

starting out: modern benoni

ENDRE VEGH



EVERYMAN CHESS

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Foreword

Welcome to this book in which I will try to present the wonders of the Modern Benoni to you. This is a Starting Out book and, as such, is not a traditional openings monograph. I have, therefore, decided to use a great deal of space for a long introduction with the typical plans, while presenting the theoretical chapters not as lines that need to be memorised (though some do if you play at a level where your opponents memorise them too; otherwise most often you will not need to do so), but as inspirational chapters where the games themselves will give you a *feeling* for playing the opening.

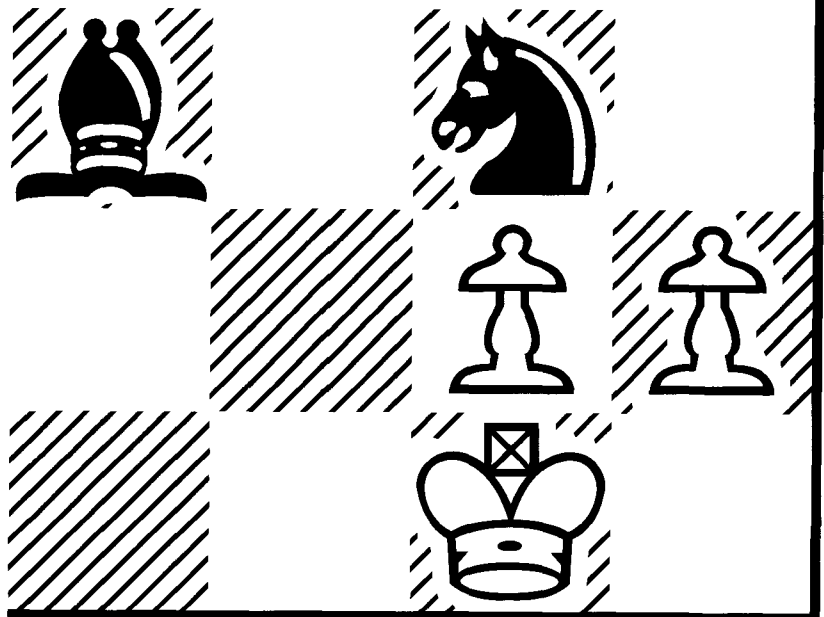
The Modern Benoni is a dynamic opening and offers Black good chances of winning the game, probably more so than most other defences against 1 d4, but at the cost of substantial risks with a very low quantity of draws. But if you do not feel chicken, but want to play entertaining and dynamic chess, then the Modern Benoni may be for you.

Endre Vegh,
Budapest,
November 2004

Chapter One

Introduction to the Modern Benoni

- ▨ The Son of Sorrow
- ▨ What is the Modern Benoni?
- ▨ Overview of Strategic Ideas
- ▨ Strategic Ideas for White
- ▨ Strategic Ideas for Black



The Son of Sorrow

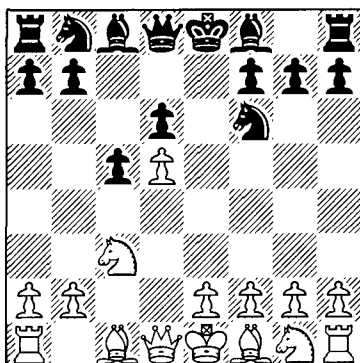


Diagram 1
The Modern Benoni

The Modern Benoni is also called the son of sorrow. It is an opening that, more than any other, can be attributed to the hypermodern way of playing chess. The starting position after **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6** (Diagram 1) can be dated back to the end of the 19th century. But at that time Black players would develop their king's bishop to e7, ignoring the potential for counterplay that developing the bishop to g7 would give. It was only after the Second World War that this dynamic way of playing the position became popular. Our modern databases are not always an accurate witness to history, but they can still be used as a source of partial information. The first game in my database where Black continued with ...g7-g6 and ...Bf8-g7 (instead of the stale ...Bf8-e7) was a game by Nezhmetdinov played in 1950. From that day on the Modern Benoni grew in popularity – especially because Mikhail Tal employed it in his ascendance to his World Championship match against Botvinnik. The following famous game shows what the Modern Benoni was able to offer Tal, that made him use it again and again throughout his career.

Game 1

□ Gurgenzidze ■ Tal

USSR Championship, Moscow 1957

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 Na6 11 Re1 Nc7

It was the invention of this plan by Nezhmetdinov which inspired Tal to use the Modern Benoni. As we know now this is often a slightly dubious way of developing, but in this game it worked well. The main problem is that the knight takes two moves to get to c7, where it has little influence over the important squares in the centre. Generally speaking, it is more often better placed at d7.

12 a4 b6! (Diagram 2)

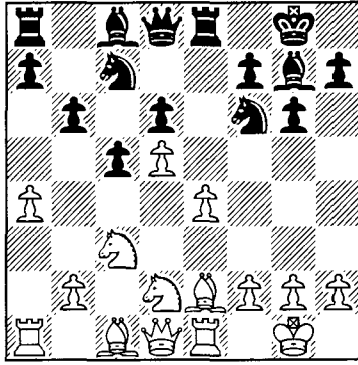


Diagram 2

Black plans ...Ba6 or ...a6, ...b5

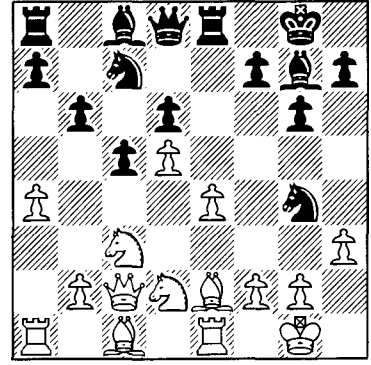


Diagram 3

Black begins a king hunt

The idea behind this move is to play ...Bc8-a6, as well as to prepare ...b6-b5 with ...Bc8-d7, ...Ra8-b8 and ...a7-a6. If Black had played 12...a6 White would have been able to secure himself a small structural advantage with 13 a5!?, although Black still has an interesting plan in 13...Bd7!? with the idea of ...Bd7-b5.

13 Qc2

It seems that White should be able to find a better waiting move. The idea behind the text is to play Nd2-c4 without leaving e4 hanging, but it weakens White's control over the kingside too much. 13 h3!? has been suggested as an improvement.

13...Ng4!

The knight is doing little on f6, as the pressure against e4 is only of fleeting importance. Instead the weakness of the dark squares on the kingside is important. Also the knight will find a good square on e5.

14 h3? (Diagram 3)

White completely ignores the threats to his king. This game was played at the start of Tal's career and sacrifices on f7, e6 and h7 (or f2, e3 and h2) were still allowed – in a fashion that seems unreal to today's youngsters.

Instead, 14 Bxg4!? was an interesting possibility. White would not usually want to part with this bishop, but here he does so as Black then has less control over e5 and problems in finding a good square for his own bishop after Nd2-c4 and Bc1-f4.

14...Nxf2!!

A brilliant sacrifice that draws the white king into the open.

15 Kxf2

White cannot decline the sacrifice either. After 15 Rf1 Nxh3+ 16 gxh3

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Bxh3 his kingside is torn apart.

15...Qh4+ 16 Kf1 Bd4 17 Nd1

The only way to defend against the mate.

17...Qxh3!! (Diagram 4)

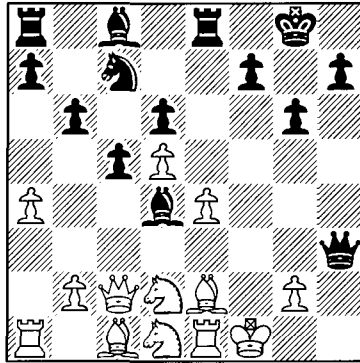


Diagram 4

The queen cannot be taken

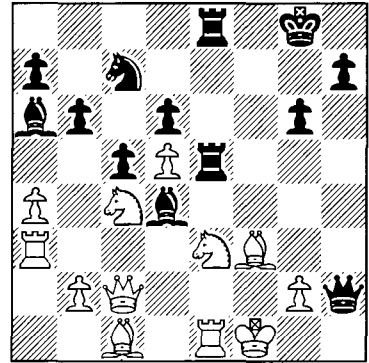


Diagram 5

Bombarding the enemy king

This queen sacrifice must have come as a surprise to White. But even after 17...Bxh3 18 Bf3 Bc8 Black would have a reasonable attack for his piece. So it is really difficult to spot exactly what was the reason for White's mistake.

18 Bf3

The only move. White has to cover himself against ...Bc8-g4+. Of course not 18 gxh3 Bxh3 mate, while after 18 Bb5 Qh1+ 19 Ke2 Bg4+ 20 Kd3 Qxe1 Black wins again.

18...Qh2

Black has sacrificed a piece for only two pawns. But once you stop and consider which pawns we are talking about, you realise the permanent danger in White's position. The white king will never feel safe again.

19 Ne3

After the alternative 19 Nf2 Black has at least three main options, which it makes sense to analyse.

a) 19...Ba6+? 20 Be2! is still dangerous for White, but it is not easy to prove a direct win, e.g. 20...Qh4 21 Nh3 Bc8 22 Nf3! would be OK for White, and the game might end in a draw after 22...Qxh3 23 Nxd4 Qh1+ 24 Kf2 Qh4+.

b) 19...Nxd5!? is very direct: 20 exd5 Rxe1+ 21 Kxe1 Qg1+ 22 Nf1 Ba6 23 Nd3 Re8+ 24 Be2 Bc8! and White cannot defend himself satisfactorily against the threat of ...Bc8-g4. Worse is 20...Ba6+? 21 Be2 Bxf2 22 Nf3! (not 22 Kxf2? Qh4+ 23 Kf1 Rxe2 24 Rxe2 Re8 and Black wins after 25 Nf3 Qh1+ 26 Kf2 Rxe2+ 27 Qxe2 Bxe2 28 Kxe2 Qxg2+ 29 Ke3 g5 – White

might have three pieces for the queen, but this is the only good thing to say about his position which is in a state of general collapse) 22...Qg3 23 Bxa6 Bxe1 24 Bb5 Bb4 25 Bxe8 Rxe8 26 Bg5 and White seems to have beaten off the attack and the position remains unclear.

c) 19...f5, as in the game, is the most logical move. The white centre cannot hold together. 20 Nc4?! fxe4 21 Rxe4 Bf5 would give Black a strong attack against the white king, while after 20 Re2 Black has many ways to strengthen his attack. 20...Qh4!? as suggested by *Fritz* is one move, which leads to a strong pressure for the piece. Another is 20...Ba6! 21 Nc4 fxe4 22 Rxe4 Rxe4 23 Nxe4 Nxd5 and the white king is completely stripped of cover. That Black will win seems beyond doubt.

19...f5 20 Ndc4

20 Ke2 is the computer's move. Obviously this is very risky and in the 1950's no one would consider such a move, but these days nothing is too strange for the well-educated tournament player. However, White's position is falling apart all the same: 20...Bxe3!? 21 Kxe3 g5 would be one way for Black to continue the attack against the white king.

20...fxe4 21 Bxe4 Ba6! 22 Bf3 Re5?

This automatic move is rather careless as it allows White still to offer some resistance. Black has many better moves, one of which is 22...Qf4! winning at once.

23 Ra3 Rae8 (Diagram 5) 24 Bd2?

Now White collapses. After 24 Rd3! Black still has the edge and a strong attack, but the direct win is missing. 24...Nxd5 was given as winning in the four-volume collection of Tal's games published by Chess Stars, but did not take into account the only move 25 Nxe5! when the position remains unclear. One continuation is 25...Nf4 26 N5c4 Qh1+ 27 Kf2 Qh4+ 28 Kf1 when Black does not seem to have more than a draw. The preliminary 24...Rg5 is probably better.

24...Nxd5!

Not a very difficult combination.

25 Bxd5+ Rxd5 26 Ke2 Bxe3 27 Rxe3 Bxc4+ 0-1

On 28 Qxc4 Qxg2+ mates.

Tal is not the only World Champion to have used the Modern Benoni successfully in important games. Fischer used it in his World Championship match against Spassky, and Kasparov has played it several times too, such as a crucial game against Korchnoi at the Lucerne Olympiad 1982, where he daringly sacrificed a piece and won.

Among modern players the Modern Benoni has less support than previously. Chess is like all other aspects in human life: fashions are very important. In the 1950's Tal's sharp, tactical chess replaced, for a short while, the long strategic games of Botvinnik and Smyslov. Then came Petrosian with his very prophylactic style, though the 1960's were dominated just as much by the more modern dynamic play of Spassky, Larsen,

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Korchnoi and Tal. Fischer and Karpov both had a very strong emphasis on technique and the 1970's saw many short draws. In the 1980's Kasparov changed the understanding of chess with his dynamic play, while in the late 1990's Kramnik and the computer programs changed chess again, and a more defensive style has once again become predominant, even in the games of such wonderful attacking players as Kasparov and Judit Polgar. The latter recently said in an interview in *New in Chess* that she had changed her style as it gave more points to counter-attack.

As can be seen, it is merely fashion that makes Topalov the only top player in the third millennium to employ the Modern Benoni regularly. Other sharp openings, such as the King's Indian and Benko Gambit, have also lost popularity lately and find fewer and fewer followers. This does not mean that they are bad systems, however. Nimzowitsch declared the Scandinavian Defence (1 e4 d5) as losing in *My System* in the 1920's, but it still gave Anand a reasonable position in his 1995 World Championship match against Kasparov. Fashions change and many follow them, while some do not.

The Modern Benoni is a difficult opening to master. It offers Black a lot of piece activity in return for a rather fragile pawn structure in the centre. But as the game played by Tal above illustrates, it also offers good winning chances! In his old book on the Modern Benoni, Nunn wrote that God playing White would probably beat God playing Black in this opening. But between humans there is no reason why this opening should not offer you great results. It is a difficult opening to master for *both* colours and should therefore be treated with respect.

What is the Modern Benoni?

The Benoni structure is known from many openings. The basic structure comprises black pawns on c5 and d6 vs. a white pawn on d5 (Diagram 6), but there are numerous different variations on this.

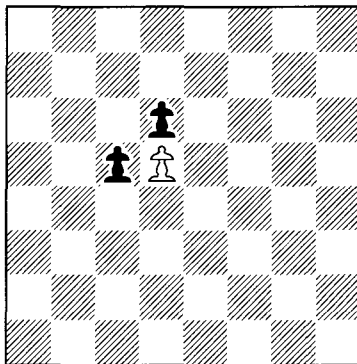


Diagram 6

The basic Benoni structure

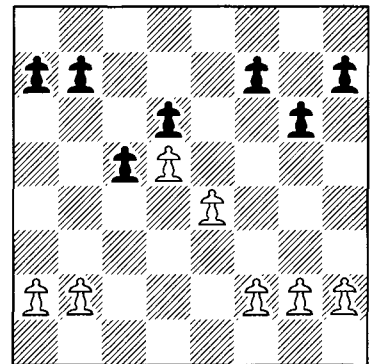


Diagram 7

The Modern Benoni structure

One is the Schmid Benoni which often arises after 1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e4 Nf6 4 Nc3, where White refrains from playing c2-c4 in order to use the c4-square for his knight (Nf3-d2-c4); another is the Czech Benoni, arising after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5. (More Benoni systems will be considered in the book *Starting Out: Benoni Systems* by Raetsky/Chetverik, to be published in the spring of 2005.) These systems are rather passive compared with the Modern Benoni, which most commonly arises after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6. However, fear of the variation 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+ (see Chapter 4) has encouraged Black to look for different ways of transposing to the Modern Benoni, the chief characteristic of which is the exchange ...e6xd5 with White replying c4xd5, producing the following pawn structure (**Diagram 7**):

Besides the main line, there are many ways to get into the Modern Benoni. I will present some of them here.

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6. This move order is especially designed to avoid the variation with f2-f4 and Bb5+ mentioned above. Here White has already developed his knight to f3 and therefore is less flexible in his set-up. To my knowledge there is no drawback to this move order, besides White having 3 Nc3, which can also be met with 3...c5 with likely transposition to the main line. This has no visible drawbacks for Black either, except that White can now play the f2-f4 lines if desired.

An important move order is via the King's Indian, which can occur in many ways. Here are some of them, all starting **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6** and then:

- a) 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Be2 c5 7 d5 (7 0-0 would aim for different structures) 7...e6 and Black is ready for ...e6xd5. This can often be delayed a little; a move like ...Rfe8 first could prove useful.
- b) 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 cxd5 which is actually the main line of the Four Pawns Attack versus the King's Indian; 9 exd5 is not considered very sexy by modern theory. However, when you come to the Modern Benoni from a different move order e4xd5 must often be taken into account, so please note that the structures with e4xd5 are not considered in this book.
- c) 5 f3 0-0 6 Be3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Qd2 exd5 9 cxd5. In this line 7 dxc5 or 7 Nge2 are more common; the latter may also become a true Benoni after 7...Nc6 8 d5 Ne5 9 Ng3 e6 and then 10 Be2 exd5 11 cxd5, but still it is only bordering on the sacred ground. Another related line is 6 Bg5 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Qd2 exd5 9 cxd5
- d) 5 Nf3 0-0 6 h3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Bd3 exd5 9 cxd5 (9 exd5 is another main line here) and we have a main line in the Modern Benoni once again.

There is yet another way to go for the Modern Benoni structure. After **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5**, Black can simply develop first with **3...g6 4 e4 d6** and only after ...Bg7 and ...0-0 start to think about ...e7-e6 and ...exd5. Again the main problem seems to be that White can maintain a slight space advantage with e4xd5 at any given moment. Only the quick ...e6

and ...exd5 prevents this rather boring idea.

However, we should not forget that the Modern Benoni is not heavenly bliss for Black, but just another dynamic opening among equals, so there is not necessarily any reason for White to avoid it!

An Overview of Strategic Ideas in the Modern Benoni

The Modern Benoni is one of those openings that leaves Black with a suspect pawn structure, but in return gives him free piece play. The struggle in the Modern Benoni is often between White trying to open the centre and get the passed pawn the structure seems to promise him, and Black trying for counterplay either on the queenside or in the centre, mainly through active piece play, but also with possible pawn breaks from the side (...b7-b5 or ...f7-f5). White, of course, hopes to restrict the black counterplay and win by opening the position to his advantage. His slight space advantage and freer movement gives him the chance to foresee Black's ideas and try to prevent them. This is one important aspect of the strategic battle in the Modern Benoni, which is going on all the time, and will be an underlining factor in all of the strategic examples below. In fact it is so common that to treat it separately makes little sense.

Some club players tend to make decisions based on abstract observations, in no way related to the actual position in front of them. The following examples should not be read as such. They are typical situations in the Modern Benoni, but just knowing about them will not tell you whether they are good or bad. However, not knowing about these ideas would be a serious limitation for you when you play the opening (with either colour). Therefore, since this is a Starting Out guide and not a heavy theoretical manual, I decided to include some basic strategic situations in this introduction. They are split into first White's plans and then Black's plans. White might seem to have fewer options compared to Black, but in return he has more space and often a slight lead in development. So holding on to his advantage by preventing the black ideas is actually at the top of the list of White's priorities, even if it is not highlighted with its own separate heading below.

Strategic Ideas for White

The advance e4-e5

The most important strategic idea for White in the Modern Benoni is the pawn push e4-e5. This advance will most often eliminate the d6-pawn, and thereby give White a passed d-pawn, just as it is likely to irritate the black pieces. There are many situations and circumstances where e4-e5 can be played. I will give some of the most common examples of how this can take place, and what can be obtained thereby.

White follows up with Nxe5

One of the most common examples is when White plays e4-e5 and, after ...d6xe5, recaptures with the knight. This is a positional improvement for White, who gets a passed d-pawn and the possibility to transfer the knight to c6, where it can prove very powerful. Though this is a strong plan, we will see in the first example that it is not necessarily decisive when it is achieved.

□ Piket ■ Van Haastert
Dutch Championship 2001

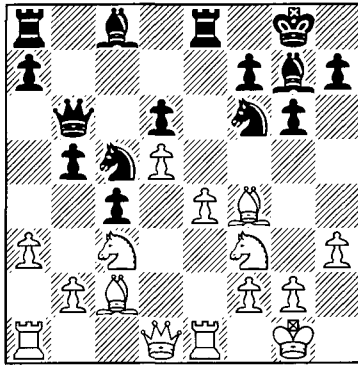


Diagram 8

White is ready for e4-e5

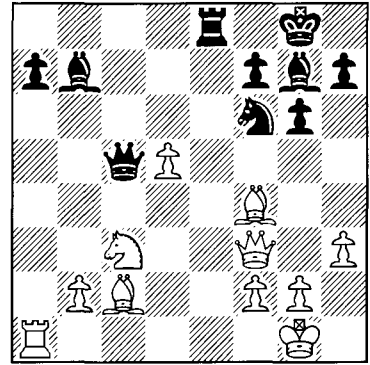


Diagram 9

White is a pawn up

White has mobilised his forces in order to get the pawn push e4-e5, so now when it is perfectly possible, it would make little sense not to get on with it.

(Diagram 8) 15 e5!

The only move that makes sense. After 15 Qd2 Nfd7! Black suddenly has control over e5 and will have time to continue with his own counterplay on the queenside.

15...dxe5 16 Nxe5 Bb7?!

Strangely, this natural development move gets Black in trouble. To keep the position in balance, it was necessary to contest White's influence in the centre with 16...Nh5! 17 Bh2 (17 Qf3 Nxf4 18 Qxf4 f5 19 Rad1 Bb7 gives Black good play) 17...Nd7 18 Nc6 (the most ambitious; 18 Nxd7!? might give White a slight long-term advantage due to the passed d-pawn, but not really enough to do anything with after ...a7-a5 and ...b5-b4) 18...Bb7 19 Qf3 Bxc6 20 dxc6 Ne5 21 Qd5 Rad8 22 Qxb5 Qxb5 23 Nxb5 Nxc6 and Black has a lot of active counterplay, which is his way to fight for equality in almost all positions in the Modern Benoni.

17 Qf3

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When White achieves full development he will have a great grip on the centre and his space advantage will count. Therefore Black now becomes a little panicky. The best option was to admit to the mistake and defend a worse position. But no, Black tries for counterplay all the same. Sound psychology, but a bad move.

17...b4?

Better was 17...Rad8 even though White would have realised his positional ambitions after 18 Nc6! Bxc6 19 dxc6 Ne6 20 Be3 Nd4 21 Bxd4 Rxd4 22 Rxe8+ Nxe8 23 Re1 with advantage due to the advanced passed pawn. Then Black should be very careful and not fall for traps like 23...Kf8? 24 Qe3 Nc7 25 Nxb5! Qxb5 26 Qe7+ Kg8 27 Qxc7 and White wins.

18 Nxc4!

White just wins a pawn.

18...Qa6 19 axb4 Qxc4 20 bxc5 Qxc5 21 Rxe8+ Rxe8 (Diagram 9) 22 Ba4

22 Be3! was even stronger.

22...Rc8 23 Rd1 h6?!

23...Qb4 was better, still with a bad position.

24 Bxh6!

Now White just wins.

24...Nxd5 25 Nxd5 Bxh6 26 Nf6+ Kg7 27 Qxb7 Kxf6 28 Rd7 Qc1+ 29 Bd1 Rf8 30 g3 Bd2 1-0

In the next example White is unable to keep his knight and transfer it to c6, but clearing the way for the d-pawn is enough to give him the advantage. One of the main reasons for this is that, contrary to the previous example, Black has a ruined pawn structure on the queenside, and his apparent counterplay against b2 does not prove sufficient. Notice in the diagram position that, although Black seems to have control over the e5-square, White can play the e4-e5 break anyway thanks to a tactic.

□ **Aaberg** ■ **S.B.Hansen**

Sweden 2002

(Diagram 10) 19 e5! dxe5

19...Nh5 20 e6! also gives White the advantage, while 19...Nxe5 20 Nxe5 dxe5 21 d6 transposes to the game.

20 Nxe5 Nxe5 21 d6! (Diagram 11)

21 Rxe5 Rxe5 22 d6! also works.

21...Nf3+?!

A bad decision. White is happy not to have to waste a tempo recapturing on e5.

No better was 21...Qb6?! 22 Rxe5 Rxe5 (or 22...Rxb2 23 Rxe8+ Nxe8 24 Na4 Rxc2 25 Nxb6 and White wins a piece) 23 Bxe5 Rxb2 24 Qc1! (retaining the threat of Na4 as well as Bxf6 followed by d7; the immediate 24

Na4!? Rxc2 25 Nxb6 Nd7 26 Bxg7 Nxb6 27 Bxh6 leads only to a small advantage, and with his two passed pawns Black has real drawing chances) 24...Qb3 25 Nd5 Rc2 26 Qe3 Qxe3 27 Nxe3 and White wins a piece.

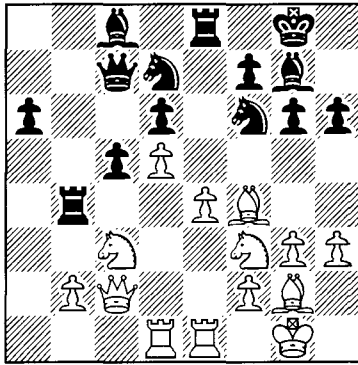


Diagram 10
Tactics support e4-e5

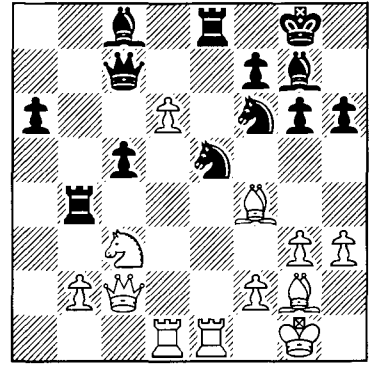


Diagram 11
A standard interfering pawn push

The best chance was 21...Qb8! 22 Rxe5 Rxe5 23 Bxe5 Rxb2 24 Qc1 Nd7 25 Bxg7 Kxg7 26 Na4 Re2 27 Nxc5 Nxc5 28 Qxc5 Bd7. White has a strong position with the advanced d-pawn, but for the moment Black is successful in blocking it, and with accurate play should still keep the game within the limits of a draw.

22 Bxf3 Rxe1+ 23 Rxe1 Qd8 24 Nd5!

White opens up for all his pieces to attack the black weaknesses.

24...Nxd5 25 Bxd5 Bb7 26 Bxb7 Rxb7 27 Qxc5

and White went on to win the game.

The Advance e4-e5 Supported by the f-pawn

It can often be a good idea for White to strengthen the e4-e5 break by supporting it with the f-pawn. This can be done as in the following example:

□ Khenkin ■ Fedorowicz
New York 2000

White has some advantage as Black has not really managed to develop real counterplay. Especially strange was the fact that Black decided to trade dark-squared bishops, which is not an exchange he would usually desire. Now White grabs space in a simple fashion.

(Diagram 12) 19 f4!

Black now cannot prevent e4-e5 because of the d5-d6 trick seen above.

19...Qd8 20 e5 dxe5 21 fxe5 Bf5 22 d6 (Diagram 13)

and White has a large advantage which soon gave him a full point.

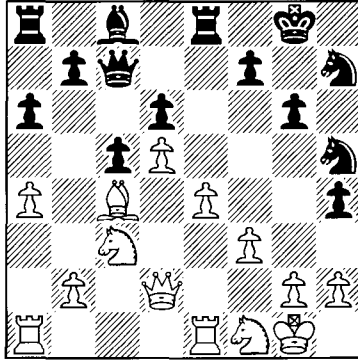


Diagram 12
White will prepare e4-e5

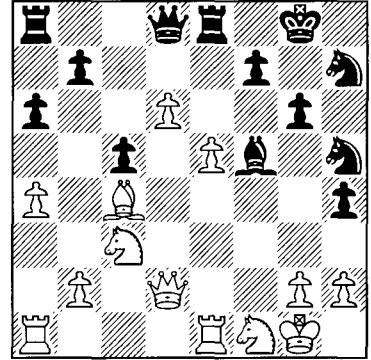


Diagram 13
The advanced pawns are very strong

That was the horror scenario for Black. Fortunately, the advance does not always come about so easily. Often Black will not take on e5, which only opens the f-file for White and for the dark-squared bishop. Here is a good example:

□ Yevseev ■ Khalifman
Togliatti 2003

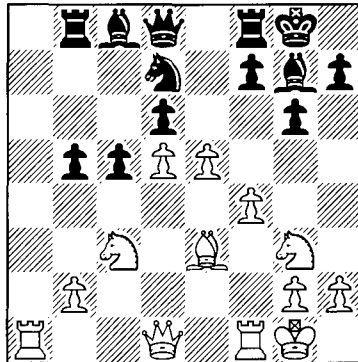


Diagram 14
Black neutralises e4-e5

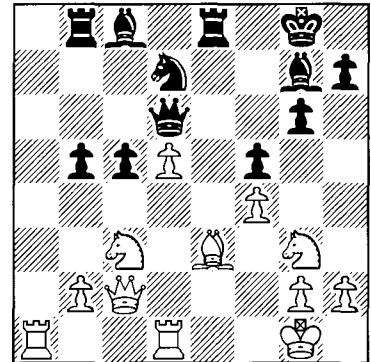


Diagram 15
The black army is more mobile

In this game Khalifman demonstrated an alternative strategy for Black which is sometimes available. It works like this: The greatest advantage for White with the advance e4-e5 is to take control over the e4-square for his pieces, even at the cost of a pawn. What Khalifman decided was simply to prevent this plan, and White found it difficult to keep his position together.

(Diagram 14) 17...f5!

Black takes control over e4 and thereby undermines the defence of the d5-pawn. Next comes ...Bb7, ...Nb6 and ...b4 and the pawn will be lost. Therefore White restrains himself from the promising e5-e6.

Instead 17...dxe5 18 f5! would give White strong play for the pawn, as seen below in similar examples.

18 exd6

18 exf6 Nxf6 19 f5 b4 would also give Black a good position.

18...Qb6 19 Qc2 Qxd6 20 Rfd1 Re8 (Diagram 15)

The black pieces are more active, he has the two bishops and full mobility for his pawns. No wonder he managed to win the game without trouble.

21 Qf2 b4 22 Na4 Ra8 23 Nf1

There is hardly anything better. If 23 Nxc5 Rxa1 24 Rxa1 Qxd5 25 Nxd7 Bxd7 26 Nf1 b3 and White has two really soft spots: g2 and b2.

23...Bb7 24 h3 Ra5 25 Ra2 Bxd5 26 b3 Qe6 27 Rad2 Bxb3 28 Rxd7 Bxa4 29 Rxc7+ Kxc7 30 Rc1 Bc6 31 Bxc5 Ra2 32 Rc2 b3 0-1

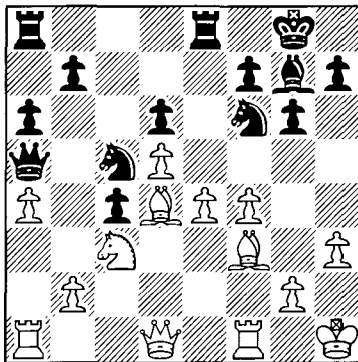
White's problems in this game were not due to the advance e4-e5, but developed earlier in the game, including the exchange of the light-squared bishop for a knight. Usually the advance e4-e5 becomes stronger when supported with the f-pawn, and gives White beautiful victories...

□ Mercadal Benejam ■ Yanes Valdes

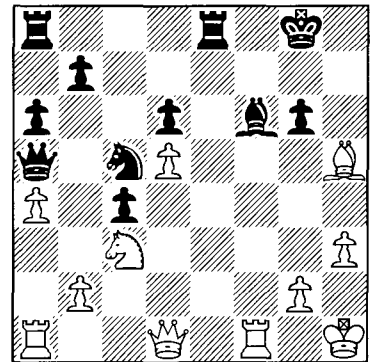
Correspondence 2001

(Diagram 16) 17 e5

For no obvious reason Black has allowed the advance e4-e5. His last move ...Nd7-c5 looks very ambitious, but is probably more suspicious than anything. Now White gets on with it.

**Diagram 16**

The pawns storm forward again

**Diagram 17**

White has a winning attack

17...Nfd7

17...dxe5? 18 fxe5 would only open up the position further.

18 e6!

This is what White should do. He needs to get his bishop on f3 to work.

18...Nf6?

It is hard to criticise this move since it is difficult to find a decent alternative. Black's strategy here is actually understandable, only it is insufficient. Black wants to keep the position closed for as long as possible, but because of the weakness of the light squares (a potential malady in the Modern Benoni if you get rid of the bishop on c8), White is able to create a really dangerous attack.

18...fxe6 was possibly better, but White still has a lot of play. The following not too unlikely variation shows how badly it could go: 19 dxe6 Nf6 (19...Nxe6! 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Ne4 d5! 22 Nd6 Nf6 with nearly enough play for the exchange is probably Black's best try) 20 f5 gxf5 21 Bxf6 Bxf6 22 Bd5 Bxc3 23 bxc3 Qxc3 24 Rxf5 Kh8 25 Ra3!! Qg7 26 Rf7 Qe5 27 Qc2 and the black position cannot be defended. Of course there were many improvements, but this shows how dangerous the position is for Black.

19 exf7+!

White should not miss this chance to open the position.

19...Kxf7 20 f5 Kg8!

Black tries to get out of danger. 20...Nb3 21 fxc6 hxc6 22 Ne4 Nxe4 23 Bxe4+ Kg8 24 Bxg6! would give White an absolutely winning attack, while 20...g5 21 Bh5+ wins at once.

21 fxc6 hxc6 22 Bxf6 Bxf6 23 Bh5! (Diagram 17) 23...Bxc3

After this the game is lost. The last try was 23...Rf8 24 Bxg6 Qc7 when there is nothing immediately decisive to be seen. Black should control his optimism though, as White should still win.

24 Bxg6 Rf8

The only move, though clearly insufficient. Instead 24...Re7 25 Qh5 with the threat of Bf7+ gives Black no chances of survival, and 24...Ne4 25 Qg4 Nf6 26 Rxf6 Bxf6 27 Bxe8+ Kf8 28 Qe6 wins easily for White.

25 Qg4!

The strongest way to proceed with the attack. Now Black is forced to close the seventh rank for himself.

25...Bg7 26 Qh5!

Now this is much stronger than before.

26...Bh6 27 Bf7+ Rxf7 28 Rxf7 Ne6 29 Qxh6 1-0

The Advance e4-e5 Played as a Pawn Sacrifice

Sometimes White plays e4-e5 even though he has no control over e5 and cannot win it with tactics (as in the Aaberg-Hansen example above – page 14). But there can be other reasons for playing the pawn break, one of which is undermining the c5-pawn.

□ Rotstein ■ Goldin
Paris 1994

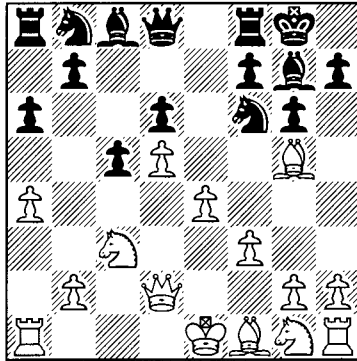


Diagram 18

A King's Indian Benoni hybrid

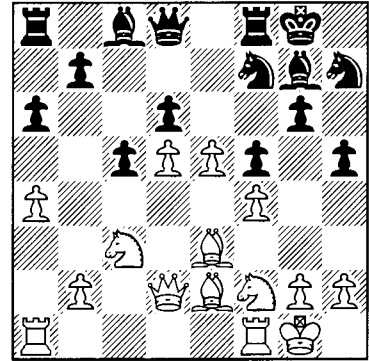


Diagram 19

White threatens e5-e6

We start the game a little early, as there are some subtleties I would like to bring to the reader's attention.

(Diagram 18) 10...Nbd7?!

First of all, in this structure White will not put his knight on f3, so it will have no other really good square than f2, from where it controls the important squares e4 and g4. Therefore Black should delay this developing move, which blocks the light-squared bishop, for a little while. Better was 10...h6 11 Be3 Re8 12 Nge2 and only now 12...Nbd7.

11 Nh3!

White is happy to accept this extra option.

11...h6 12 Be3

12 Bxh6?! does not win a pawn since Black has a standard trick, which works very often: 12...Nxe4! 13 Nxe4 Qh4+ 14 g3 Qxh6 15 Qxh6 Bxh6 16 Nxd6 (sometimes winning this pawn is nice for White, but not here) 16...Nf6 17 Nxc8 Raxc8 18 Bc4 Rfe8+ and Black has excellent play for his pawn.

12...Ne5 13 Nf2 h5 14 Be2 Nh7 15 0-0 f5 16 f4 Nf7 17 e5! (Diagram 19)

Here it is. White is threatening e5-e6, and as the knight on f7 is really badly placed, and as d5 is in no trouble, Black will have to accept the pawn.

17...dxe5 18 Bxc5

Now the weakness of the queenside becomes apparent, while Black has all his minor pieces organised around his king.

18...Bh6!?

Black offers White the exchange, but as this would allow Black some

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

compensation on the light squares (after 19 Bxf8 Bxf4!), White wisely chooses to decline.

19 Nd3! e4 20 Ne1 Nd6 21 Nc2

White has created a strong blockade on e3 and will find it easy to put pressure on the black queenside. White went on to win a nice game.

Another typical sacrifice occurs when White desires to play f4-f5, but would be unhappy to hand the e5-square over to Black. The advance e4-e5 also gives White a beautiful square on e4 for his knights, and in some cases, as in the example below, also opens up for the light-squared bishop.

□ Penrose ■ Tal
Leipzig Olympiad 1960

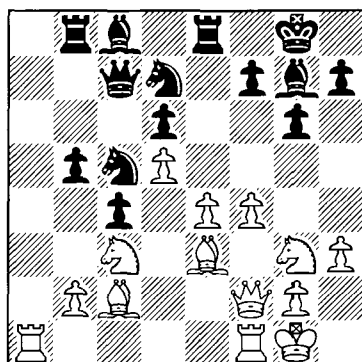


Diagram 20

Clearing e4 for a white knight

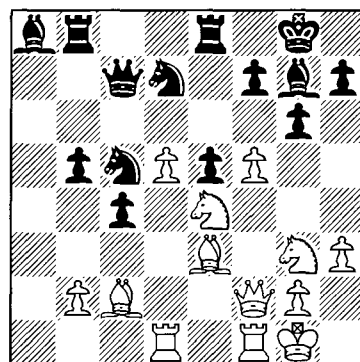


Diagram 21

The knight on e4 is very strong

(Diagram 20) 19 e5! dxe5

Here 19...f5 20 Bxf5! gxf5 21 Nxf5 would have given White an irresistible attack; for instance 21...Rf8 22 Nxg7 Kxg7 23 Qg3+ Kh8 24 Bd4 and there is no way Black will ever be able to survive. Instead 19...Rf8!? was not a completely stupid suggestion, though White must be better.

20 f5!

White achieves everything with this move: an attack against the king as well as keeping the black pieces in the dark.

20...Bb7

It is difficult to suggest better alternatives. If now 20...Rf8 21 f6! and White wins a piece, as 21...Bh8 22 d6! Qxd6 (otherwise Nd5-e7+) 23 Nf5 wins for White. In some situations 20...e4 can be the way for Black to respond, giving up the e-pawn in order to get the e5-square for his knight. Here he is too late, and White wins at once with the simple 21 fxg6 because of Qf7+.

21 Rad1 Ba8?!

It is not easy (impossible) to find a better move for Black. His pieces have no play. 21...b4 22 Nce4 Nxe4 23 Nxe4 b3 24 Bb1 is the computer's suggestion, but this hardly improves the black position. Probably 21...e4! was worth a try. White has many ways to get a good game (e.g. 22 Nxb5, 22 Bf4, 22 f6), but maybe that in itself would be the problem for him. A direct win is not easy to spot. 22 fxe6 fxe6 23 Qf7+ Kh8 is less critical now, as the white knights are not attacking.

22 Nce4 (Diagram 21) 22...Na4

Already it is hard to find a salvation for Black. The text just loses a piece, but look at lines like 22...Nxe4 23 Nxe4 Rbd8 (or 23...Kh8 24 f6! Bf8 25 Ng5 and White is completely winning, one reason being that 25...Nc5 26 d6! wins a piece) 24 fxe6 fxe6 25 Qf7+ Kh8 26 Ng5 Qb7 27 Nxe7! (27 Bxe6!? is also strong) 27...Nf8 28 Ng5 Re7 29 Be4! and Black is being outplayed by the book.

23 Bxa4 bxa4 24 fxe6 fxe6 25 Qf7+ Kh8 26 Nc5

Now White wins a piece and the game.

26...Qa7 27 Qxd7 Qxd7 28 Nxd7 Rxb2 29 Nb6 Rb3 30 Nxc4 Rd8 31 d6 Rc3 32 Rc1 Rxc1 33 Rxc1 Bd5 34 Nb6 Bb3 35 Ne4 h6 36 d7 Bf8 37 Rc8 Be7 38 Bc5 Bh4 39 g3 1-0

There are also situations when White simply sacrifices the e-pawn to open lines in the centre in order to utilise a better development. However, this is not a book on the e4-e5 push in the Modern Benoni, so I think we will continue by looking at some other typical manoeuvres for White.

Looking for the Best Square for the f3-knight

A standard manoeuvre in the Modern Benoni is Nf3-d2-c4, which is most often the best square for the white knight in this type of structure. We will see this again and again, so there is no real reason to single it out here for special treatment. However, there is an extension of this manoeuvre, which requires special attention. After Black has advanced his b-pawn, White often has the additional possibility of invading the black position with the knight via a5 and c6. This is hardly shown better than in the following example.

□ Pr.Nikolic ■ Cebalo
Yugoslavia 1987

(Diagram 22) 12 a5

A new move.

12...b5!?

This does not lead to equality. For more information about the g2-g3 system see Chapter 2.

13 axb6 Rb8 14 e4!

14 Nd2 Nxb6! would be OK for Black.

14...Rxb6

14...Nxb6? would now be met strongly with 15 e5!.

15 Nd2! (Diagram 23)

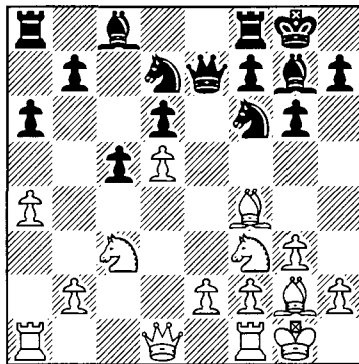


Diagram 22

Controlling the backward b-pawn

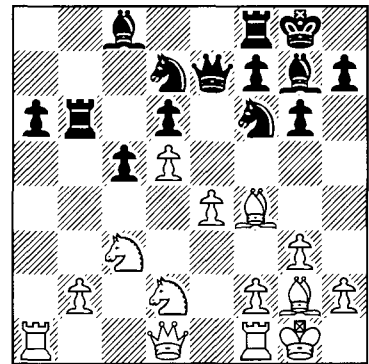


Diagram 23

The knight heads for the queenside

Now this is the right time. Notice that b2 is immune because of the weakness of the d6-pawn.

15...Ne8

Nikolic gives the following line to prove his advantage: 15...Nh5 16 Nc4! Nxf4 17 Nxb6 Nxb6 18 gxf4 Qh4 19 Qb3! and White is better.

16 Nc4 Rb4 17 Na5! Nb8 18 Nc6 Nxc6 19 dxc6 Rxb2 20 Nd5

White has an obvious advantage and went on to win the game.

The creation of outposts is often an important part of White's thinking. It seems tempting to play Nf3-d2-c4 quickly in the opening, as from c4 the knight not only controls e5, but also puts real pressure against the d6-pawn. However, this manoeuvre costs a lot of time and, as we have seen, the knight can be just as well placed on f3 for the advance e4-e5. Nevertheless, the c4-square is the ideal square for the white knights and fighting for it is often a positional feature of this opening.

□ Campos ■ Cramling

Terrassa 1989

Seemingly White cannot enter the c4-square, but a nice tactical resource gives him the possibility of grabbing the square from Black.

13 a4! b4?

After this move Black has a very rigid structure and finds it impossible to find real active counterplay. As we shall see, Black should usually react much more dynamically to problems posed in the Modern Benoni. Here I suggest an improvement with 13...Rb8!? 14 axb5 axb5 when I do not see a straightforward advantage for White, and even though moves like 15 Ra7

and 15 Qc2 looks fine, it is hard to prove an advantage. Maybe 15 Qe2 is the strongest, as White does not achieve anything from forced lines such as 15 Ra5 b4 16 Nb5 Rxb5 17 Rxb5 Ba6 18 Qa4 Bxb5 19 Qxb5 Ne5 when Black is not worse.

14 Nc4!! (Diagram 25)

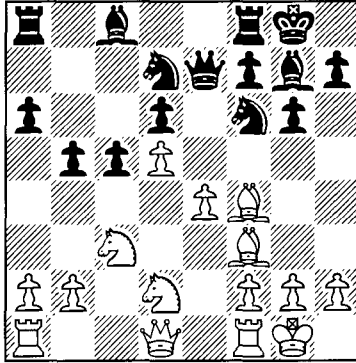


Diagram 24

White's knight wants the c4-square

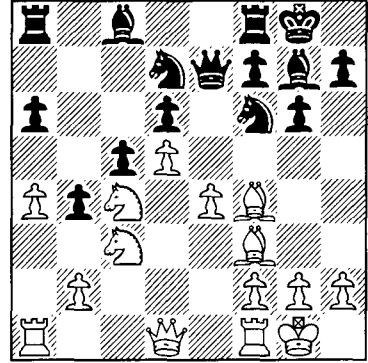


Diagram 25

Achieving positional goals through tactics

Somehow Black must have underestimated her weaker opponent – or completely misunderstood the position. After this White has a lasting positional advantage.

14...Ne8

Sadly forced. If 14...bxc3 15 Bxd6 Qe8 16 e5! and Black cannot avoid material losses, e.g. 16...cxb2 17 Rb1 Nh5 18 e6! fxe6 19 dxe6 Ra7 20 exd7 Rxd7 21 Bc6 and White will be at least a pawn up after 21...Rxd6 22 Qxd6 Qd8 23 Qxc5 Bf5 24 Rxb2 (24 Nd6!?! is probably also strong, though it is dangerous not to eliminate that passed pawn) 24...Bxb2 25 Nxb2.

15 Nb1!

The knight is off to reinforce the c4-square. White has a clear edge.

15...Ne5 16 Bxe5 Bxe5 17 Nbd2 Rb8 18 Re1 Bd7 19 Rc1 b3 20 a5 Rb4 21 Nxe5 dxe5 22 Be2 Nd6 23 Rxc5 Rd4 24 Rc7 Qd8 25 Qc1 Ba4 26 Rd1 Qb8 27 Nf3 Rxd1+ 28 Bxd1 Qb4 29 Qc5 Rb8 30 h4 Qxc5 31 Rxc5 Rb4 32 Be2 Nxe4 33 Rc8+ Kg7 34 Bxa6 Nf6 35 Bc4 Bb5 36 Nxe5 Bxc4 37 Rxc4 Rb5 38 a6 Ra5 39 Rc7 Nxd5 40 Rxf7+ Kh6 1-0

Black overstepped the time limit while making this move, but it did not make a lot of difference.

The reply to the a2-a4 advance should hardly ever be ...b5-b4. The closing of the queenside and the strength of the c4-square is just too much to fight against. It is better to open the queenside and accept the weaknesses which follow. Remember, active play is everything for Black in the Modern Benoni. Here is an example in which Black reacted in a more positive way:

□ Farago ■ Forintos

Benasque 1993

(Diagram 26) 12 a4!?

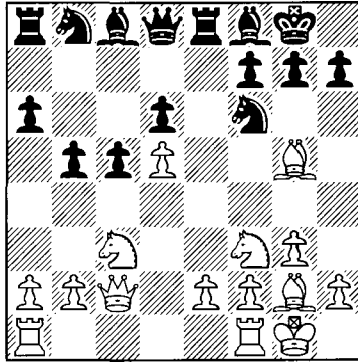


Diagram 26

How should Black respond to a2-a4?

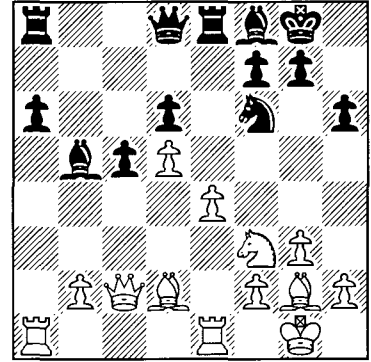


Diagram 27

Black has good counterplay

12...bxa4!

Black opens the b-file in anticipation of future pressure on the white b-pawn.

13 e4 Nbd7 14 Rfe1 h6 15 Bd2 Nb6 16 Nxa4 Nxa4 17 Rxa4 Bd7!

Mobilising the light-squared bishop, which usually has problems getting active.

18 Raa1 Bb5 (Diagram 27)

and Black had good counterplay.

This strategic twist is simply a 'must know'. It is not always the best, and ...b5-b4 is not always bad, but ...bxa4 is the move you generally want to play, while ...b5-b4 is the move you can play occasionally. Usually you need to be ensured that there is a reward for playing ...b5-b4, as there would have been in the following example, where both options are possible...

□ Begovac ■ Wojtkiewicz

Bern 1993

(Diagram 28) 15 a4!? bxa4!?

Actually Black could have considered 15...b4 here for tactical reasons. After 16 Nd1 h5!? White has problems finding a good reply to the threat of ...h4-h3, e.g. 17 Bg5 h4 18 Bxh4 Nxe4 19 Nxe4 Qxh4 20 Nxd6 Nxf3+! and Black has good counterplay. The retreat 17 Nh1! is probably best; Black can then try 17...Nxf3+!? 18 gxf3 Nxe4 19 fxe4 Bxa1 20 Nhf2 and I think White is probably slightly better, though the position remains very unclear.

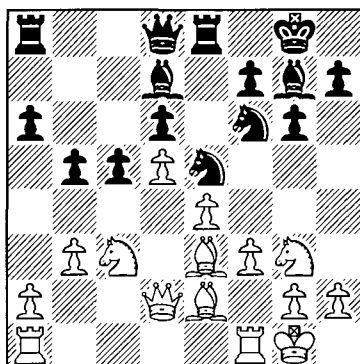


Diagram 28

How should Black respond this time?

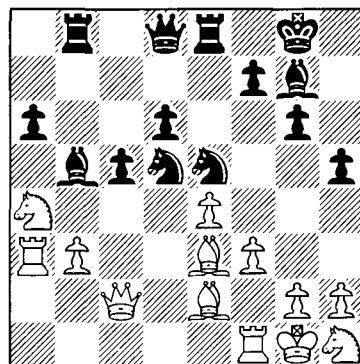


Diagram 29

Black emerges a pawn up

16 Nxa4

This seems strange. 16 bxa4 h5 17 Nh1 was more logical and White might still possess a slight edge.

16...Rb8 17 Qc2

Here I prefer 17 Nc3!?! a5 18 Ra3 with unclear play.

17...Bb5 18 Ra3 h5 19 Nh1?

Under pressure White blunders. 19 Bg5 would have kept the position in balance.

19...Nxd5! (Diagram 29)

Black, a strong Grandmaster, does not let such an opportunity pass by.

20 exd5 Nd7 21 Bxb5 axb5 22 Bf2 bxa4 23 Rxa4

23 bxa4 Rb2 was pretty grim as well.

23...Nb6

Black wins a pawn and the game.

24 Ra7 Nxd5 25 Qc4 Nc7 26 Ng3 Rb4 27 Qd3 Nb5 28 Rb7 Nc3 29 Rxb4 cxb4 30 Ne4 d5 31 Nc5 Qd6 32 Qa6 Qxa6 33 Nxa6 Bf8 34 Bc5 Bxc5+ 35 Nxc5 d4 36 Nd3 Re3 37 Nxb4 d3 38 Nxd3 Rxd3 39 Re1 Nb5 40 b4 Rb3 41 Re4 Kg7 42 h4 Nc3 0-1

The Advance a4-a5 as Prophylaxis

One of the most common moves in the Modern Benoni is White playing a2-a4 in response to ...a7-a6, in order to prevent ...b7-b5 and active Black counterplay on the queenside. This is more or less an automatic move, which always makes it interesting when White refrains from it for some reason or other.

The following two examples show White in an advantageous situation, where the move a4-a5 creates a solid bind on the queenside.

□ Kramnik ■ Illescas Cordoba

Alcobendas (match) 1993

18 a5! (Diagram 30)

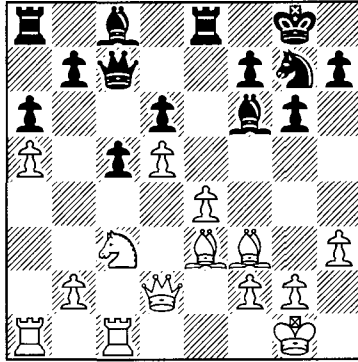


Diagram 30

White initiates a queenside clamp

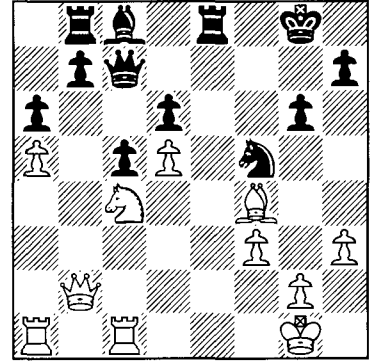


Diagram 31

What now for White?

18...Be5

Kramnik sees no hope in 18...Bd7 19 Na4 Bxa4 20 Rxa4 when he estimates that White is winning after 20...Be5 21 Rac4 f5 22 b4, which seems true.

19 Na4

19 b4!? was also possible, but there is no reason to go for complications when the text move gives an advantage without trouble.

19...f5

Black needs to create counterplay or he will suffocate.

20 Nb6 Rb8 21 Nc4!

A pawn sacrifice. 21 Ra4 was also possible.

21...fxe4 22 Bxe4 Bxb2 23 Qxb2 Rxe4 24 f3 Re8 25 Bf4 Nf5 (Diagram 31)

25...Rd8 loses to 26 Nxd6 Rxd6 (or 26...Ne8 27 Nxe8 Qxf4 28 Qg7 mate) 27 Qe5! and Black has no defence.

26 Nxd6!?

This was thought to give White's advantage away. An important point is that after 26 g4? Nd4 27 Bxd6 Qf7 28 Bxb8 Re2 Black seems to have a lot of counterplay. Even against the most accurate play Black is better: 29 Qb6! Nxf3+ 30 Kh1 Bxg4! (not 30...Nd4? 31 Qd8+ Re8 32 Ne5 Rxd8 33 Nxf7 Kxf7 34 Rxc5 and White should win) 31 Qd8+ Re8 32 Qd6 Ng5! 33 Ne3 Bf3+ 34 Kh2 Rxe3 35 Qd8+ Qe8! and Black has the initiative, despite the missing exchange.

However, Kramnik found that after 26 Kh1!? White would have kept

strong pressure on the black position. The main threat is 27 g4. *Fritz* comes up with 26...Qd8 as the best defence, but on 27 Rab1 it is not easy to see how Black is going to free his position. After 27...g5 28 Bh2 b5 29 axb6 Bb7 30 Qd2 White remains better, though it is very complicated.

26...Nxd6 27 Qf6 Bf5!

Did Kramnik overlook this? After 27...Rd8 28 Be5! White wins.

28 Bxd6 ½-½

The players agreed a draw. However, after 28...Qd8 29 Be5! (29 Qxd8 Rbx8 30 Bxc5 Rxd5 is an obvious draw) 29...Qxf6 30 Bxf6 Black still has some problems to solve, e.g. 30...Kf7 31 Bh4 Rbc8 32 Rc4! (if 32 Ra4?! Re5! with counterplay) 32...Bd3 (not 32...Re5? 33 Rd1! and White has serious chances) 33 Rf4+ Kg8 34 d6 Bb5 35 Rd1 Bd7 36 Rc4 and White has the advantage, though nothing is anywhere near decided.

Such a player as Judit Polgar of course understood at an early age that the move a4-a5 was advantageous for White, but here in the following example she provokes it needlessly, surely sparked by a tactical oversight.

□ **Piket** ■ **J.Polgar**
Aruba (match) 1995

(Diagram 32) 12 a4

A natural move preventing ...b5. Now comes a move that was possibly a blunder.

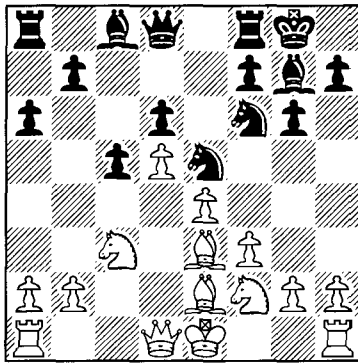


Diagram 32
White prevents ...b7-b5

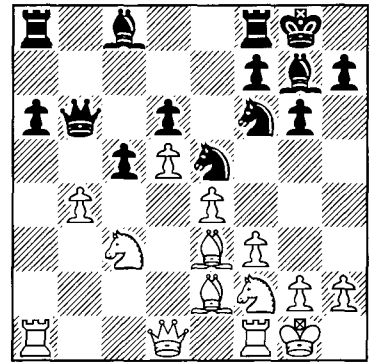


Diagram 33
Take note of this b2-b4 trick

12...Qb6?

Something like 12...Re8 was much better.

13 a5!

Probably it was only now that Black realised that it was not possible to take on b2.

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

13...Qc7

If 13...Qxb2 14 Na4 Qb4+ 15 Bd2 Qd4 16 Nb6 followed by Ra4 gives Black a horrible position.

14 0-0 b5 15 axb6 Qxb6

Now the game went its own way. Piket played 16 Qd2?! and the game became unclear. We are more interested in a common trick White could have pulled here.

16 b4! (Diagram 33) would have been very strong.

After 16...Qxb4 17 Nb5! the black queen is in trouble, and if 17...axb5 18 Rxa8 Bd7 19 Ra6! Ne8 20 Qc2 then 21 Rb1 is a very unpleasant threat. Black is without chances of salvation.

The move a4-a5 gives White a better pawn structure on the queenside. Although Black at times can live with this, in the following example Black decides to play ...b7-b5 all the same, hoping that the counterplay against the b2-pawn (after a5xb6 *en passant*) will be sufficient. The strategy is similar to that considered above, where White provoked Black with the move a2-a4 against the b5-pawn.

□ Lautier ■ Kasparov

Horgen 1995

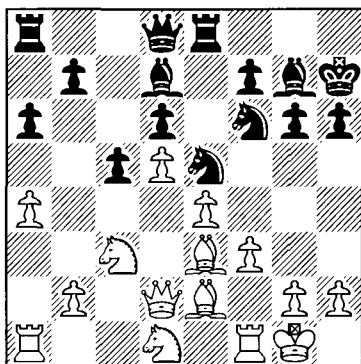


Diagram 34

Black plans to open the queenside

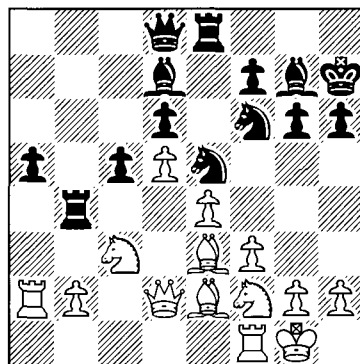


Diagram 35

Typical counterplay on the b-file

16...Rb8 17 a5

White could try another plan, b2-b4, as we will describe shortly below. But after 17 Rb1 Black would probably have replied 17...Qa5! when the control over the b4-square gives him good counterplay.

17...b5!?

Black decides to sacrifice a pawn in order to continue with his counterplay. That he can achieve compensation is an important part of his whole game plan.

18 axb6 Rxb6 19 Nf2

White decides not to go on any adventures, but instead develops calmly. If 19 Rxa6!? (19 Bxa6? Qa8 20 Qe2 Bc8 obviously does not work) 19...Rxa6 20 Bxa6 Qb6 21 Be2 Qb4 22 Nf2 Nc4 23 Bxc4 Qxc4 24 Bf4 Qa6 with the idea of ...Rb8 and Black has good counterplay against the b2-pawn. These kinds of pawn sacrifices are also known from similar structures in the Benko Gambit.

19...a5!

Now the a-pawn is no longer weaker than the pawn on b2.

20 Ra2

If 20 Rxa5?! Rxb2 21 Qxb2 Qxa5 22 Ra1 Qb4! and Black has good play, as his passed c-pawn is not matched by anything in the white camp.

20...Rb4 (Diagram 35)

Black is not worse.

21 Rfa1 Qb6 22 Rxa5!

22 Nfd1 Ra8 is not an improvement for White, who instead secures the draw.

22...Rxb2 23 Qc1 Rb8 24 Bd2 Qb3 25 R5a3 Qc2 26 Qxc2 Rxc2 27 R3a2 ½-½

Playing on the ‘Wrong’ Flank: the Advance b2-b4

Usually in the Modern Benoni White is focused on advancing e4-e5, but at times it makes sense for him to play b2-b4 in order to open files on the queenside. Or simply, as in the following example, to slow down the opponent’s counterplay.

As we shall see in this example and the next, it holds certain risks to open files on the queenside. And as always in the Modern Benoni, will the conclusion to the positional decisions made early in the game be found in the tactics following them? The annotations to the game should give it away.

□ I.Sokolov ■ Hamdouchi
French League 2003

(Diagram 36) 17 b4!

The idea behind this advance is simple. Black has control over the e5-square, so White will not likely get to play e4-e5 in the near future, whereas Black has freedom to play ...c4 and ...Nc5. With b2-b4 White takes control over the c5-square. If Black plays ...c4 then the pawn is solidly blockaded.

Black should probably respond with ...c4 and free his knight from the responsibility of guarding c5. Instead he takes on b4, hoping to utilise the c4-square. This does give him the two bishops, but as one on c8 is rather useless, this is a limited victory. However, he cannot simply close the queenside, so his task is not simple here.

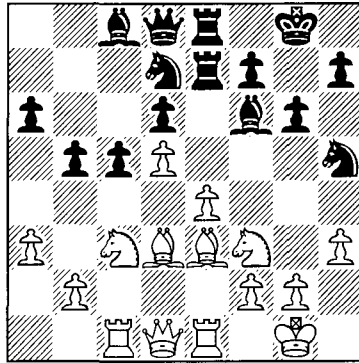


Diagram 36

White forestalls ...c4, ...Nc5

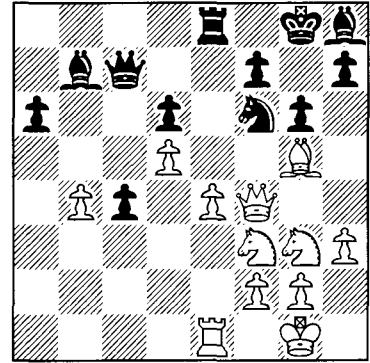


Diagram 37

White gambles the queenside

17...Bh8

If 17...c4? 18 Bb1 Ne5 19 Nd4 and White has many threats, including g4-g5 and f2-f4.

18 Qd2 Nhf6 19 Bb1 cxb4!?

This is not what Black desires positionally, but it is hard for him to improve his position otherwise. And after this he does not stand too badly.

20 axb4 Nb6 21 Bd3

21 Bd4!? Nc4 22 Qg5 with advantage was also possible.

21...Bb7 22 Bg5

22 Bd4! was stronger, in order to avoid the exchanges. After 22...Nc4 23 Qg5 Rc7 24 Re2 White is a little better.

22...Rc7 23 Ne2 Nc4 24 Bxc4 Rxc4 25 Rxc4 bxc4 26 Ng3

It seems that White grants the c-pawn an easy life. The knight belongs naturally on c3 here, but White has a creative idea of his own.

Worth considering was 26 Qd4 Qe7 (if 26...Nxe4 27 Bxd8 Bxd4 28 Nexd4 and White is better) 27 Nc3 Rc8 28 e5 (or 28 Qb6!?) 28...dxe5 29 Nxe5 with a slight advantage.

26...Qc7 27 Qf4!? (Diagram 37)

White is gambling the queenside, hoping his presence on the other side will be decisive. That he wins has nothing to do with the accuracy of his play, but rather with the inaccuracy of the defence.

27...Nd7 28 Qh4 Ne5?!

This seems to be a very careless exchange. Black had one thing going for him in the position and that was the c-pawn. It seems right to play 28...c3 29 Bf4 Bg7 when the position is pretty unclear. Generally I would believe in Black here, as his king is hard to attack, while it is relatively easy to see that the c-pawn holds promise. 30 Rc1 Qb6 is one possible line which

is hard for White to meet; for example if 31 Rb1 Nc5!.

29 Nxe5 Bxe5 30 Rc1 Bg7?

30...f5!? seems to be better. Black puts the white centre under pressure and includes the queen in the defence. Of course there are also draw-backs, but the closed king's position gives Black problems in the end.

31 Bf6! h6

If 31...Bxf6 32 Qxf6 Rc8 33 h4! and Black has no adequate defence to h5-h6, e.g. 33...h5 34 Rc3! Re8 35 Nxh5 gxh5 36 Rg3+ Kf8 37 Rg7 Rxe4 38 Rh7 Ke8 39 Rh8+ Kd7 40 Qxf7+ Re7 41 Qf5+ Re6 42 Qxe6 mate.

32 Nh5! (Diagram 38)

Black is certainly under a lot of pressure here.

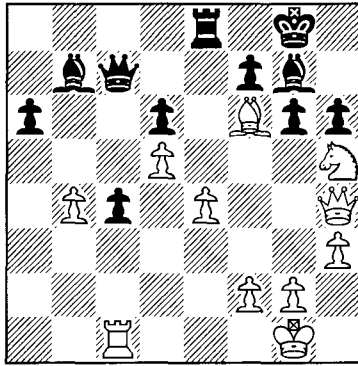


Diagram 38

Black is under pressure

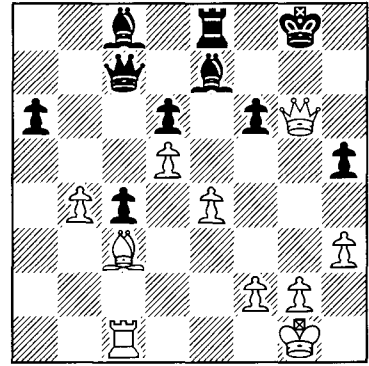


Diagram 39

Black has no choice but to resign

32...Bf8

32...gxh5?? 33 Qg3 does not float.

33 Qg4 Bc8?

33...Kh7 was absolutely the only move. Black cannot live with the knight threatening to come to f6. White has the advantage after 34 Ng3 Rc8 35 Bd4, but the game is still not over, while if 34 Ba1 gxh5 35 Qf5+ Kg8 36 Rc3 (36 Qf6 Re5 does not work) 36...h4! and White's attack does not seem to be decisive; probably the best is just to take the perpetual check at once.

34 Bc3

34 Ba1! was stronger, since after 34...Qd8 35 Qg3 Be7 36 Rxc4 simply wins a pawn; 36 Qc3!? is also pretty strong.

34...Be7

34...Qd8 35 Qg3 Be7 was a better defence, though White still has very powerful threats after 36 Ba1! Bh4 37 Qe3 Bg5 (if 37...gxh5 38 Qxh6 f6 39 Qg6+ Kf8 40 Qxh5 Bg5 41 Rxc4 and there is no defence against 42 h4) 38

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Qd4 f6 39 f4 gxh5 40 fxg5 hxg5 41 Rxc4 and White should win eventually.

35 Qf4! gxh5 36 Qxh6 f6 37 Qg6+ 1-0 (Diagram 39)

37...Kf8 38 Bd2 and 39 Bh6+ mates, while 37...Kh8 drops the rook.

In the next game we see the most common structure after b2-b4. Again I could say a lot of abstract things about the structure, but I think it is more important to focus on the tactical element of the Modern Benoni. After Black's 18...c4 we have the noted structure, which sometimes favours White, and sometimes Black. Usually this depends whether or not White is able to blockade the c-pawn and demolish the black queenside or break through in the centre at the same time. In this game Black destroys his own queenside himself, but for a purpose. In the end White cannot avoid the exchanges that remove his blockade of the c-pawn. After this it is very difficult for him to meet the black manoeuvring, and eventually the c-pawn advances as part of a tactic, leading to White's defeat.

□ Beliaevsky ■ Portisch

Szirak Interzonal 1987

(Diagram 40) 15 Rb1

White plans first to block the queenside and then turn to the centre.

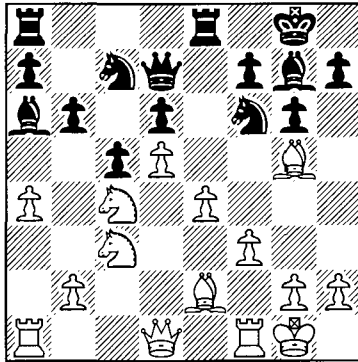


Diagram 40

White intends to block the queenside

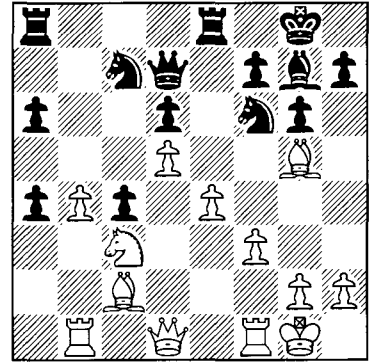


Diagram 41

Vacating b5 for the black knight

15...Bxc4 16 Bxc4 a6 17 b4 b5 18 Bd3 c4!?

18...h6 had previously been played here. Instead Black decides to play on the strength of his passed pawn. This decision could go either way, but because of the forceful play from Portisch, a slight mistake from Beliaevsky lands him in perpetual positional difficulties.

19 Bc2

19 Be2!? was possible, fighting against ...bxa4, but the bishop naturally belongs to c2.

19...bxa4! (Diagram 41)

In this way Black is able to activate the c7-knight and fight against the blockade of the c-pawn.

20 Bxa4

Interesting was 20 Nxa4!? Rab8 (20...Nb5 21 Nb6 Qa7 22 Be3 Nc3 23 Qe1 Nxb1 24 Nxa8 Qxa8 25 Bxb1 Nxd5 26 exd5 Bd4 looks like a long and beautiful combination, but White wins with 27 Bxd4!) 21 Nc3 Nb5 22 Nxb5 axb5 23 Be3 Ra8 24 Bd4, though Black is hardly worse. Both the white Bc2 and black Nf6 have problems becoming active.

20...Nb5 21 Kh1?!

This move is understandable, but there was no time for it! It is often so in the Modern Benoni that time wasted is time lost! Better was 21 Qd2! Qb7 22 Ne2 Rac8 23 Be3 when the position is wildly complex. Probably White should live with the knight on b5 for the moment, in order to be able to attack the c-pawn.

21...Qb7 22 Bxb5?!

This decision seems anti-positional to some extent. 22 Nxb5 axb5 23 Bc2 Ra2 is obviously weak, but 22 Ne2 was again interesting and even though Black is probably slightly better, White should not be too unhappy.

22...axb5 23 Be3

It is not easy to be White here. This move is met with a few nice tactics that remove the blockade of the c-pawn, but the alternatives were also grim. If 23 Qd2 Ra3 24 Be3 Rxc3! 25 Qxc3 Nxe4 26 Qa3 Nc3 27 Rbe1 Nxd5, while 23 Qc1 would be met strongly by 23...Nd7! with the idea of invading the white structure with the knight. And it does not seem as if White has compensation for the pawn after 24 f4 h6! 25 Bh4 Bxc3 26 Qxc3 Rxe4 as he has no easy way of attacking the black king.

23...Ng4! 24 Bd4 (Diagram 42)

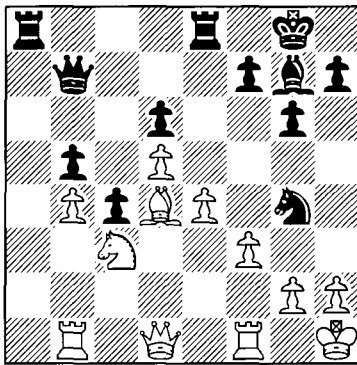


Diagram 42

Black wants to clear the c-pawn's path

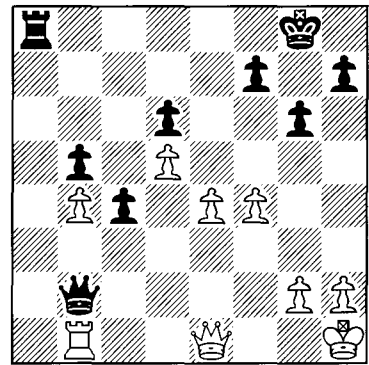


Diagram 43

Finally the c-pawn can advance

If 24 fxg4 Bxc3 25 Bd4 Bxd4 26 Qxd4 Re5 followed by ...Qe7 and White

has too many weaknesses to be happy.

24...Ne3! 25 Bxe3 Bxc3

The blockade has been removed and Black will gain free entry down the a-file.

26 Bd4 Bxd4 27 Qxd4 Qa7!

The rook endgame is unpleasant for White. The advance ...f5 will activate the rook on e8, while White will have problems both defending b4 and controlling the c4-pawn.

28 Qc3

28 Qf6 Qe7 29 Qc3 Qe5! does not improve anything for White.

28...Qe7 29 Ra1 Rxa1 30 Qxa1

30 Rxa1 f5! 31 Re1 Qe5 also gives Black a very strong endgame. The problems evaluating the different lines here is that whatever White does, Black has a clear advantage. But as nothing is forced the game moves will always look worst, as they lost, while the other opportunities are only clearly worse. However, that does not mean that they are better!

30...Rc8!

30...f5? 31 Qa6! would allow White to develop counterplay.

31 Rc1 Qc7 32 Qc3 Ra8 33 f4

If 33 Ra1 Rxa1+ 34 Qxa1 c3 and the endgame wins easily.

33...Qa7!

Portisch is fantastic in these kind of positions. 33...Ra2 34 Qf6 Qa7 35 e5 would again offer White counterplay.

34 Qd2

Better was 34 e5, but even then after 34...Qf2 35 exd6 Qxf4 36 d7 Qf5 White does not have very good chances of surviving.

34...Qa2 35 Qe1 Qb2 36 Rb1 (Diagram 43) 36...c3!

Now the c-pawn advances and it cannot be denied. If 37 Rxb2?? cxb2 and 38...Ra1 wins.

37 h3 Ra2 38 Qf1 c2! 39 Rc1 Qxb4 40 e5 Rb2 41 Qf2 Qe4 42 Kh2

42 exd6 loses by force to 42...Rb1 43 Qf1 Rxc1 44 Qxc1 Qd3 45 Kh2!? (or 45 d7 Qd1+ 46 Kh2 Qxc1 47 d8Q+ Kg7 48 Qc7 Qb2 and White can resign) 45...Qd1 46 Qe3 Qxd5 47 Qc3 Qxd6 48 Qxc2 Qxf4+ and so on.

42...Qxd5 0-1

Strategic Ideas for Black

After having gone quickly through the basic ideas for White in the Modern Benoni with some nice examples (I think), it is now time to look at the possibilities for Black. It will be clear that Black has many more possibilities than White. This is not always an advantage. If White has only a few and strong options to choose from, while Black has a lot but of variable value, it is clearly easier to play White. However, the Modern Benoni

is such a complicated opening, that to understand it and to calculate well are more important than this kind of pocket-philosophical discussion.

Black Plays on the Queenside with ...b7-b5

□ Vyzmanavin ■ Kir.Georgiev
Groningen 1993

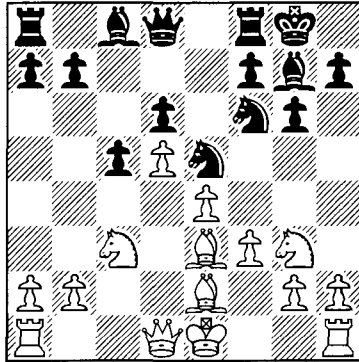


Diagram 44

Where can Black find counterplay?

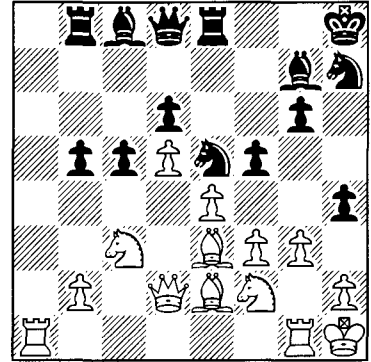


Diagram 45

Black has created sufficient play

In this position, which arose via transposition from the King's Indian Sämisch, Black needs to create counterplay. White plans to manoeuvre and then strike at the kingside. Black gradually prepares the standard advance ...b5 on the queenside.

(Diagram 44) 11...a6 12 a4 h5!?

The usual advance against a knight on g3 these days.

13 0-0 Nh7

To prepare ...f7-f5.

14 Qd2 h4 15 Nh1 f5 16 Nf2 Re8 17 Kh1 Rb8 18 Rg1!?

18 a5 b5 19 axb6 Rxb6 20 Na4 Rb4! gives Black good counterplay this time around.

18...Kh8!?

This is not strictly necessary, but it is understandable that the black king feels safer not being on the g-file right now.

19 g3 b5 20 axb5 axb5 (Diagram 45)

Black had good counterplay in this very unclear game, though it eventually was White who gained full satisfaction after some mistakes from Black.

This is the standard way to play for the ...b7-b5 advance these days.

Sometimes it is possible first to transfer the knight to c7 in order to gain extra support for the advance. However, this seriously weakens Black's

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control of the e5-square, and therefore also eases White's play in the centre a great deal. In the following rapid game between two of South East Asia's strongest players, White gains a large advantage from the opening, as Black senselessly follows this rather slow and inappropriate plan.

Game 2

□ Adianto ■ Dao Thien Hai

Cap d'Agde (rapid) 1998

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 h3 Bg7 8 e4 0-0 9 Bd3

One of the main lines.

9...Re8 10 0-0 Na6

This development is meant to support the ...b5 advance. The main drawback, as already noted, is that White gets full control over e5 more easily.

11 Bf4

11 Bxa6? bxa6 would give Black good play on the b-file. The pawn on b2 is weaker than the one on a6.

11...Nc7

11...c4!? was interesting.

12 Re1 (Diagram 46)

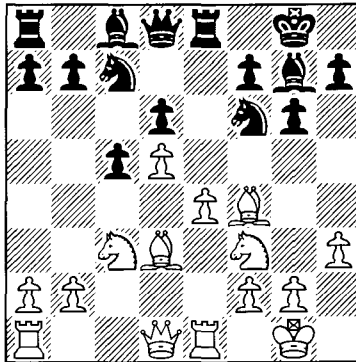


Diagram 46

White plans e4-e5 again

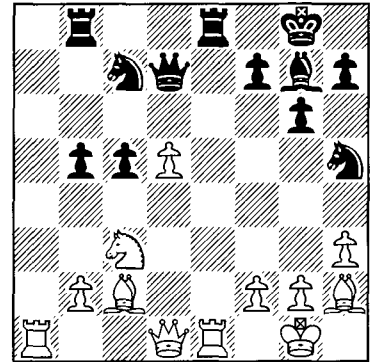


Diagram 47

Should White exchange rooks?

Black would like to play ...Nd7 and defend e5 in this way. Unfortunately, the d6-pawn would fall.

12...a6

12...Qe7 would defend d6, but it seems unlikely that White would not be able to give Black a hard time all the same, e.g. 13 e5! dxe5 14 Bxe5 Qd8 15 d6 with advantage to White.

The immediate 12...b5!?, making use of the pressure against e4, was more active and therefore a much better chance for counterplay.

13 a4 Rb8 14 Bc2!

White is not concerned about ...b5. Black has done nothing to delay e5 and therefore will suffer the full extent of the blow. White's last move is played to overprotect d5.

14...b5 15 e5!

15 axb5? Nxb5! would allow Black the chance to get rid of that horrible knight.

15...Nh5?!

15...dxe5 16 Nxe5 Bb7 17 Nc6 Bxc6 18 dxc6 would give White a solid advantage, though it is not easy to say how big. This was Black's best chance, though, as White's bishop is better at h2 and the black knight is worse on h5.

16 Bh2 dxe5 17 Nxe5 Bd7?!

a) 17...Bxh3, with the idea 18 gxh3 Bxe5 and later ...Qg5+, does not work because of 18 d6! Bxe5 19 Rxe5 Rxe5 20 dxc7 Qxc7 21 gxh3 with a clear edge for White.

b) 17...Bb7 18 d6 Ne6 19 d7 Rf8 20 axb5 axb5 21 Be4 neutralises a lot of the black counterplay and therefore gives White the upper hand. Still, the outcome is not completely clear, so it is in these lines Black should look for his best chances.

18 axb5 axb5 19 Nxd7

19 Ra7!? was also strong, with ideas like 19...Ra8 20 Nxf7! and White wins a pawn.

19...Qxd7 (Diagram 47) 20 Rxe8+?

This throws the advantage away. 20 Ra7!, with the threat of d5-d6, would win without too much trouble. After 20...Rxe1+ 21 Qxe1 Rc8 22 d6 Qe6 23 Ne4 Nd5 24 d7 Rd8 25 Qa5 Bf6 it looks as if Black is just hanging on, but White wins a piece with 26 g4 Nhf4 (or 26...Ng7 27 Ra8 and wins) 27 Bxf4 Nxf4 28 Ra6 and it is all over.

20...Rxe8 21 Ra7

21 g4!? was better, with advantage to White after 21...Bxc3 22 bxc3 Nf6 23 c4!.

21...Be5??

Black does not see what is coming. Here 21...Bxc3! would have saved him, with a likely draw after 22 bxc3 Qxd5 23 Bxc7 Qxd1+ 24 Bxd1 Re1+ 25 Kh2 Rxd1 26 Rb7. Sometimes even strong players overlook the worth of giving away this strong bishop for a greater purpose, as it seems that both players did here.

22 d6! Bxc3 23 bxc3 Qe6 24 g4 Nd5 25 gxh5 Nxc3 26 Qg4 Qd5 27 Re7 Ra8 28 Re1 Qd2 29 Re3 Qxc2 30 d7 Rf8 31 Re8 1-0

Sometimes, when White is not anywhere near playing e4-e5, Black does have time for the knight manoeuvring and to develop his bishop to a6. The following is a very standard example of this:

□ Farago ■ Haba

Austria 1999

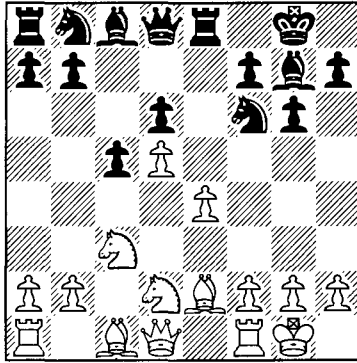


Diagram 48

How can Black counter Nd2-c4?

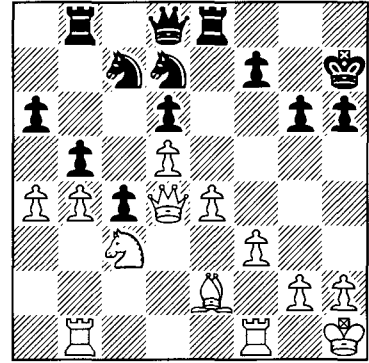


Diagram 49

Both sides have solid positions

10...Na6

White's knight is heading for c4, where it will be his best placed piece. Black therefore decides to eliminate it and at the same time work for the achievement of ...b6-b5.

11 f3 Nc7 12 a4 b6 13 Nc4 Ba6!

This is a very appropriate exchange in this position, as otherwise Black cannot play ...b6-b5 without allowing Na5-c6.

14 Bg5 h6 15 Be3 Bxc4 16 Bxc4 a6

Black will play ...Qd7 or ...Rb8 and achieve the thematic advance ...b5.

17 Qd2 Kh7 18 Rab1 Nd7 19 Kh1 Rb8 20 b4 b5 21 Be2 c4 22 Bd4 Bxd4 23 Qxd4 ½-½ (Diagram 49)

White has no advantages to build on, but on the other hand he has no real weaknesses either. Possibly Black should continue though, since once you achieve positional equality in the Modern Benoni, it is probably easier to play the black pieces than the white.

Sometimes the idea of ...b7-b5 becomes a full struggle, with White trying to prevent it, or delay it, or at least make it as uncomfortable for Black as possible, while Black tries to push it all he can. The following example is just such a case, where the advantages and drawbacks of the ...b5 advance are well illustrated.

□ Tkachiev ■ Cebalo

Medulin 2002

(Diagram 50) Black has prepared to play ...b7-b5, but White will now do everything in his power to prevent it. First by threatening the annoying manoeuvre Na5-c6.

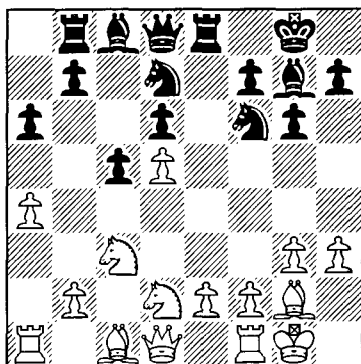


Diagram 50
The battle for b5 commences

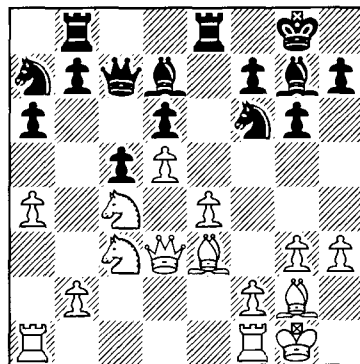


Diagram 51
Has White prevented ...b5?

13 Nc4! Nb6!

Black's reply is to try to exchange the strong knight on c4. The knight is not doing anything else on b6, but from there it can go to a8 and c7 or, as in the game, to c8 and a7.

14 Na3

Controlling b5 and avoiding the exchange of a stupid piece.

14...Bd7

Aimed at playing ...b7-b5 soon.

15 e4

White has a few moments to do something else.

15...Qc7

15...Nc8 is met by 16 Qd3!, but not 16 Nc4 b5 17 axb5 axb5 18 Na5 b4 and the e-pawn is doomed. Note that after 15...Na8 16 Nc4 the weakness at d6 counts.

16 Be3

White develops further, because he can.

16...Nc8

With the threat of ...b7-b5.

17 Qd3

Controlling b5.

17...Na7

Aiming at ...b7-b5 again.

18 Nc4! (Diagram 51)

To prevent ...b7-b5 once more. Now Black has to play a pawn sacrifice in order to stay in the game. It is very important for Black that he does not turn passive at such moments, as his structure is too loose for passive de-

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fending. Instead, it supports active play, as in the game.

18...b5! 19 axb5 Nxb5!

This was the point. Black cannot play 19...axb5 because of 20 Nxd6! and White wins a pawn.

20 Bd2!

White cannot grab the pawn anyway. After 20 Rxa6? Nxc3 21 bxc3 Bb5 22 Ra3 Nd7! White would have to fight to stay alive with 23 Bf4. Then Black has many options, one of which is 23...Nb6!? 24 Bxd6 Bxc4 25 Bxc7 Bxd3 26 Rd1 Nc4 27 Ra7 Be2 28 Re1 Rb2 29 d6 Ne5 and Black is better. For White it was enough just to see a few moves down these lines before deciding that they held no joy for him.

20...Nxc3 21 Bxc3 Bb5 22 Rfe1 Nd7

22...Re7!? 23 f4 Rbe8 with a slight edge for White was another possibility.

23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Qc3+ Kg8

24...f6!? was worth considering. It would be risky as it weakens the king, but at the same time it controls the e5-square.

25 Na5 (Diagram 52)

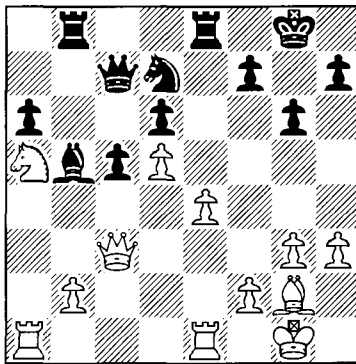


Diagram 52

Black must play actively

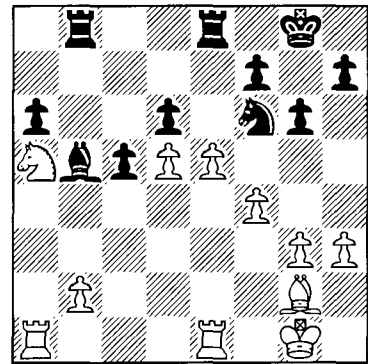


Diagram 53

White is happy here

White seems to have emerged from the opening with some advantage.

However, Black could still fight for counterplay and equality with active play, e.g. 25...Ne5 26 Re3 Qb6! 27 Bf1!? (not 27 f4?! Nd3! and Black is on his way to being better) 27...g5!? and the game is far from clear.

25...Qd8?

This manoeuvre is very passive and although Black did manage to draw the game, there is no doubt that White was very close to winning in what follows.

26 f4 Qf6 27 Qxf6 Nxf6 28 e5 (Diagram 53)

White is quite happy here. That he did not get more out of the position is

not really relevant to our discussion.

28...dxe5 29 fxe5 Nd7 30 e6 fxe6 31 dxe6 Nf6 32 Nb7 Rec8 33 Re5 c4
 34 e7 Rc7 35 Nd6 Ne8 36 Nxb5 Rxb5 37 Re2 Kf7 38 Rf1+ Rf5 39
 Bd5+ Kg7 40 Rxf5 gxf5 41 Re6 c3 42 bxc3 Rxc3 43 Kf2 a5 44 Ra6
 Rc7 45 Be6 Rxe7 46 Bxf5 Rf7 47 g4 h5 48 Kg3 hxg4 49 hxg4 Re7
 ½-½

Black Plays ...c5-c4 to Activate the Knight via c5

The second most important advance for Black in the Modern Benoni is ...c5-c4 in order to make room for the knight. Actually ...c5-c4 can be played to make room for the queen as well. I think everyone should know this trick so, just to be sure, we'll examine it briefly.

□ Parr ■ Pritchard
 British Championship, York 1959

(Diagram 54) 12...c4!

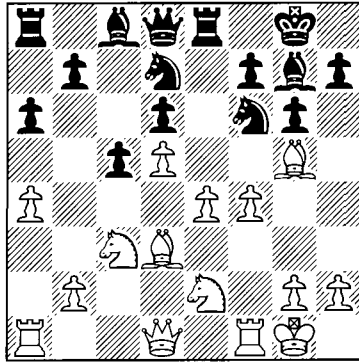


Diagram 54

Opening the a7-g1 diagonal.

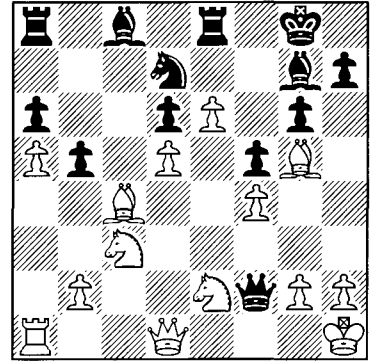


Diagram 55

What is White's best chance?

13 Bxc4

There are no better moves. If 13 Bxf6 Qb6+! 14 Rf2 Nxf6 and Black wins with ...Ng4 next move.

13...Qb6+ 14 Kh1 Ng4 15 a5 Nf2+ 16 Rxf2 Qxf2

Black has won the exchange and therefore has a clear advantage.

17 e5!

The only attempt for counterplay.

17...f5?

This move looks thematic, but unfortunately White gains too much counterplay with his passed pawn. 17...dxe5!? 18 Ne4 Qe3 19 Nd6 Rf8 20 Ra3! would also give White real counter-chances, but might still be slightly better for Black. 17...Qe3! was probably the best option.

18 e6 b5 (Diagram 55) 19 Ba2?

Now Black is allowed to consolidate. White had the extraordinary possibility of 19 Nxb5! axb5 20 Bxb5 Rb8 21 Bxd7 Rxb2 22 Qf1 Rxe2 23 Qxf2 Rxf2 24 Rb1 with approximately even chances. I know it sounds wild to say that when White is down a rook, but Black cannot win. If 24...Rf8 25 Bc6! and e7 is coming, e.g. 25...h6 26 Be7 Ba6 27 Bxd6 Rc8 28 e7 Kf7 29 Re1 Rf1+ 30 Rxf1 Bxf1 31 Bd7 Rh8 32 Bc5 and so on. The extra rook is no pleasure here. Anyway, the main point is that White could have made defeat less sure with better defence.

19...h6!

After this all the counterplay is gone.

20 Qg1 Qxg1+ 21 Nxc1 Nc5 22 Bh4 b4 23 Nd1 b3 24 Bb1 Bb7 25 Nc3 Bxc3 26 bxc3 Bxd5 27 e7 b2 28 Ra3 Be4 0-1

This kind of tactical trick is not the usual reason for ...c5-c4. Actually this example was the only one I could find in my 3.2 million game database where Black played ...c5-c4 followed by ...Nf2+ without the knight already being at g4. The following example is more common: Black plays ...c5-c4 and then dances into the White position with his knights, though White maintains equality through accurate defence, and because Black does not put him under the greatest possible pressure.

□ Gabriel ■ Hoffman
Elista Olympiad 1998

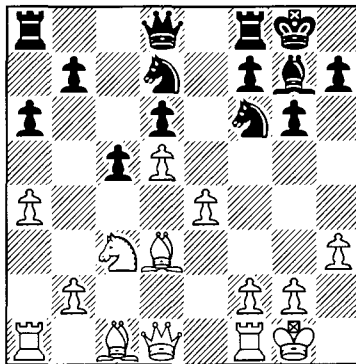


Diagram 56

Black aims to activate his knight at c5

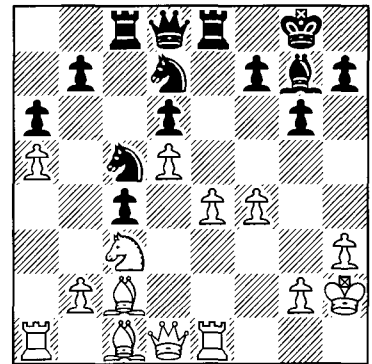


Diagram 57

What now for Black?

13...Rc8!?

13...Qc7 or 13...Re8 would be more standard.

14 Re1

Alternatives to this strategy will be discussed below.

14...c4! 15 Bc2 Nc5 16 a5 Nfd7 17 f4 Re8 18 Kh2 (Diagram 57)

Black has achieved everything he could desire: he has rid himself of his only useless piece (the light-squared bishop); he has been able to tame the white pieces; he has found good use for all his minor pieces and his rooks are well placed. To top it all White is not really threatening anything. Nevertheless, there are no easy targets and it is hard to suggest a way for Black to play for an advantage.

18...Nd3!?

A temporary pawn sacrifice that leads to a completely equal position, and as such the move cannot be condemned, but Black had other options that felt more right:

a) 18...Bxc3!? 19 bxc3 Nf6 would have made it very difficult for White to defend his pawns. The best try is 20 Qf3!? (20 Qd4?! Nfxe4! nets a pawn as 21 Bxe4? Nb3 wins for Black) 20...Nxd5 21 Ba3 Nf6 and though White has compensation for the pawn, his chances are definitely not better.

b) 18...b5! 19 axb6 Qxb6 with at least equality was probably the most mainstream reaction; 20...Re7 could be played next to put pressure on the centre.

19 Bxd3 cxd3 20 Qxd3

The safest. 20 Bd2!? was an alternative. But not 20 Ra3?! Bxc3! 21 bxc3 Nc5 22 Qf3 f5! 23 e5 dxe5 24 Rxe5 Qd6! which is a perfect example of what Black can achieve with this strategy. White will find it difficult to use the weak dark squares around the black king before Black plays ...Ne4 and starts his own attack against the white king.

20...Nc5

20...f5!? was equal as well.

21 Qd1 Bxc3 22 bxc3 Nxe4 23 Qd4 f5 24 Bb2 Qh4 25 Rf1 Qf6 26 Qd3 Nc5 27 Qc2 Re3 28 Rae1 Rce8 29 c4

Or 29 Rxe3 Rxe3 30 Qd2 Qe7! 31 c4 Rd3! and Black keeps equality, as White does not get his murderous configuration on the long diagonal. 32 Qf2 Re3 33 Qd2 is a possible draw.

29...Qh4 30 Rxe3 Rxe3 31 Bd4 Qg3+ 32 Kg1 Re4 33 Bxc5 dxc5 34 Qd2 Rd4

34...Rxc4 35 d6 Rd4 36 Qe2 Re4 37 Qd2 Rd4 would also have led to a draw.

35 Qe2 Re4 36 Qd2 Rd4 37 Qe2 Re4 ½-½

This manoeuvre of ...Nc5-d3 is of course highly desirable for Black if it can be achieved without any costs, as in the following two examples. In the first of them White suffers from weaknesses and incorrect exchanges, which make fighting for equality a difficult task.

□ De Groot ■ Rosin

Correspondence 1996

(Diagram 58) 14...c4

White has played the opening without any inspiration and is already close to being worse. Now Black activates his knight via c5.

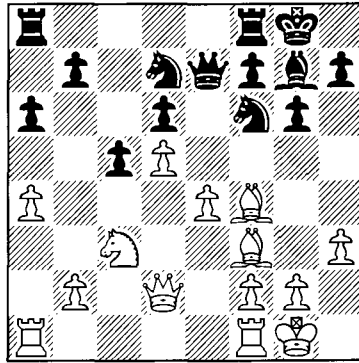


Diagram 58

The black knight belongs on c5

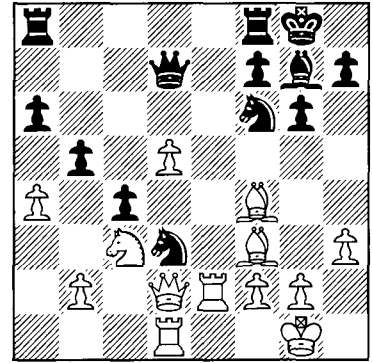


Diagram 59

Black is better co-ordinated

15 Rfe1 Nc5 16 e5 dxe5 17 Rxe5

Not 17 Bxe5? Nb3 and Black wins the exchange.

17...Qd7!

17...Qd8!? was definitely an alternative, but Black wants to play ...b7-b5.

18 Rd1

18 Qe3 was possibly better, though after 18...Nd3 19 Re7 Rae8 20 Rxd7 Rxe3 21 Bxe3 Nxd7 22 Rb1 N7c5 White is still struggling for equality.

18...Nd3 19 Re2 b5 (Diagram 59)

It is clear here that, although White seems to be better developed, his pieces are not really working.

20 b3!?

This move is easy to criticise, but it is hard to find an alternative. If 20 Bh6 Bxh6 21 Qxh6 b4 22 Ne4 Nxe4 23 Bxe4 Qxa4 and the white position is collapsing.

20...b4! 21 Nb1 Nxf4 22 Qxf4 cxb3 23 Qxb4

23 d6!? was necessary, though Black is better. White cannot just play as if he is alright; something will have to be done in order to save the game.

23...Rab8

and Black had an advantage which eventually led to a full point.

In the next example White reacts too sharply against the ...c5-c4 advance. The lesson is how dangerous the black attack can be, and how quickly it can cut through the white position like a knife through hot butter.

Game 3

□ **Ligterink** ■ **Van Blitterswijk**

Dutch Team Championship 2000

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 c4 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8

Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 a6 10 a4 Nbd7 11 e4 Re8 12 Re1 c4!? (Diagram 60)

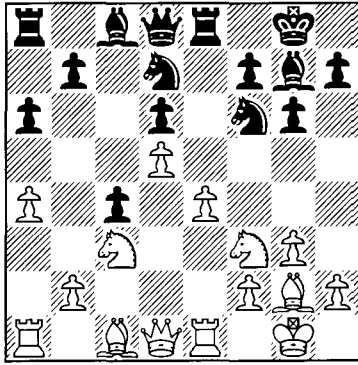


Diagram 60

The d3-square is vulnerable after g3

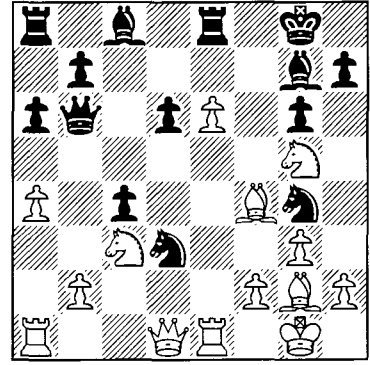


Diagram 61

Now the dark squares are weak too

13 Bf4!? Nc5 14 e5?!

White was more or less forced to follow up on his last move with an exchange sacrifice: 14 Nd2! Nd3 15 Nxc4 Nxe1 16 Qxe1 Bf8 17 a5 and the position is probably in dynamic balance.

14...Ng4! 15 e6?

White is rapidly digging his own grave. Better was 15 exd6, though 15...Nd3 16 Rxe8+ Qxe8 followed by ...Nxf2 also favours Black.

15...fxe6 16 dxe6 Nd3 17 Ng5? Qb6!? (Diagram 61)

A pleasant choice. 17...Ngxf2 18 Qe2 Bd4 was perhaps simpler, but both lines are crushing.

18 Qf3 Qxb2!

Why not?

19 Be5!?

If 19 Nce4 Bxe6 and White has no compensation for his lost material.

19...Qxf2+

Putting an ending to any counter-attack. Black wins.

**20 Qxf2 Ngxf2 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Rf1 h6 23 Nge4 Nxe4 24 Rf7+ Kh8
25 Nxe4 Bxe6 26 Rxb7 Bd5 27 Nxd6 Bxb7 28 Bxb7 c3 29 Nxe8 Rxe8
30 Bxa6 Re1+ 0-1**

All of this might come across as a sales pitch for the ...c5-c4 advance. And why not? It is a powerful move and often the knight manoeuvre will help Black. But of course there are examples of when this advance is not good, primarily because it also gives up the d4-square. A knight manoeuvre d4-c6 can quickly make Black regret the pawn push. Nevertheless, ...c5-c4 is often good and should be desired. It does not automatically lead to equality or advantage, but helps in the overall evaluation of the black position.

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

In the following example White decides to fight against ...c5-c4, but Black is able to manoeuvre and eventually get a good version of the ...b7-b5 + ...c5-c4 advances.

□ Prudnikova ■ Chelushkina

Yugoslav Championship 2002

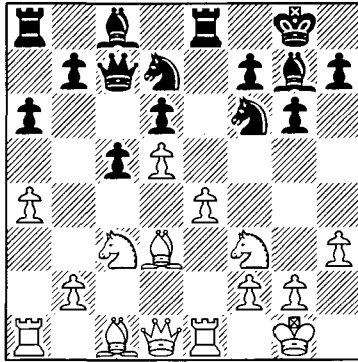


Diagram 62

How might White prevent ...c5-c4?

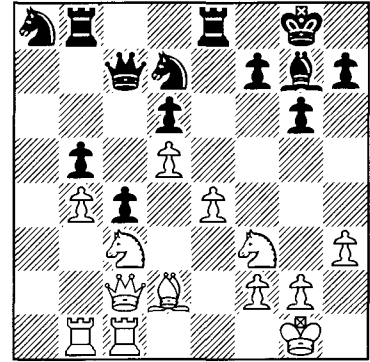


Diagram 63

The position is roughly equal.

13 Bc4!?

Black was about to play ...c4 and ...Nc5. Blockading the c-pawn is a typical way of preventing its advance, or at least delaying it.

13...Rb8 14 Qc2

This is a little passive and does not help in the fight on the queenside. 14 Bf4 leads to a theoretical position and is probably better.

14...Nb6 15 Bf1 Bd7 16 Rb1 Na8!?

16...Nc8 was probably just as good here.

17 Bd2 b5 18 axb5 Bxb5 19 Bxb5 axb5 20 b4 Nd7 21 Rec1 c4 (Diagram 63)

and the position is more or less in balance.

A variation of the ...c5-c4 advance is when it involves a pawn sacrifice. And here I do not mean a pawn sacrifice as in the first ...c5-c4 example above (where Black gave up the pawn to open the a7-g1 diagonal), but one designed to disturb a white bishop on d3, which has the dual job of defending c4 and e4.

□ Varga ■ Beim

Austria 2000

(Diagram 64) 12...c4!

Black deflects the bishop on d3 from its main job of reinforcing the centre. Now White has a difficult choice to make.

13 Bxc4!

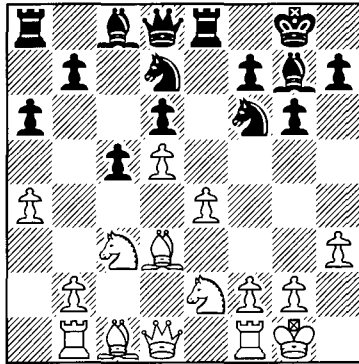


Diagram 64

Deflecting the white bishop

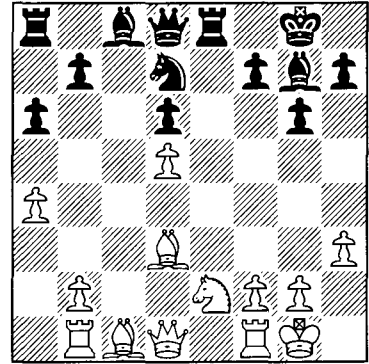


Diagram 65

A rather premature draw

13 Bc2 is often playable. But right here Black can secure the advantage with brutal activity: 13...Nc5 14 f3 b5! 15 axb5 axb5 16 Nxb5 (it is probably best to accept the pawn sacrifice; if 16 b4!? cxb3 17 Bxb3 Qa5 and Black has a clear advantage) 16...Qb6 17 Nbd4 (sorry for running wild with an illustrative line of Black's compensation... if 17 Na3 Nxe4+ 18 Kh2 Nf2 19 Qd2 Bh6 20 Qe1 Nd3 21 Nxc4 Nxe1 22 Nxb6 Rxe2 23 Rxe1 Rxe1 24 Bxh6 Rxb1 25 Bxb1 Rb8 26 Be3 Nd7 27 Nxc8 Rxc8 and the end-game is good for Black) 17...Nxd5 18 exd5 Bxd4+ 19 Qxd4 (or 19 Nxd4 Nd3 20 Kh2 Qxd4 and Black has a better game for sure) 19...Rxe2 20 Bh6 Nd7! 21 Qxb6 Nxb6 and Black is a little better.

13...Nxe4 14 Nxe4 Rxe4 15 Bd3 Re8 ½-½ (Diagram 65)

Black is not worse after this so White was objectively right to accept the draw. Boring maybe, but not everybody wants to fight in every game.

Instead 15...Rb4!? was an interesting alternative. A fantasy line such as 16 b3 Nc5 17 Bc2 b5 18 Bd2 Rh4 does not look bad at all for Black. 19 Re1 even makes it worth considering going off the rails with 19...Bxh3!? 20 gxh3 Rxh3 when Black has counterplay, though it is not clear if it is enough. One line, 21 Kg2 Nd3 22 Bxd3 Rxd3 23 Qc2 Rxd5 should be fine for Black, but then again the possibilities are many.

Black Plays ...f7-f5 to Open Lines on the Kingside

Instead of playing on the queenside exclusively, ...f7-f5 is another way to play the Modern Benoni. When it is possible this advance is often good for Black, but the main problem is that White is usually on his way to playing e4-e5. In the next example White has no such active plans.

□ Kramnik ■ Ivanchuk

Belgrade 1995

(Diagram 66) 11...Nfe8!?

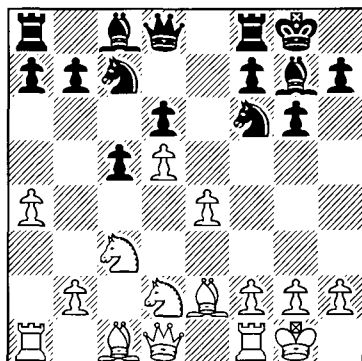


Diagram 66
Black intends ...f7-f5

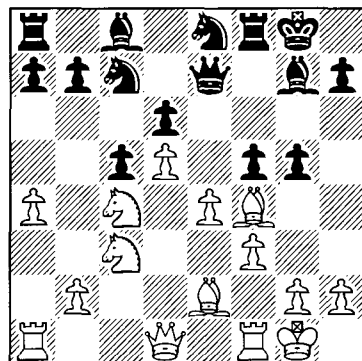


Diagram 67
Black takes control over of e5

Ivanchuk prepares the ...f7-f5 advance, of which he is very fond.

12 Nc4 f5 13 f3?!

Together with the next move this is dubious, allowing Black to get into a preferable structure without any trouble. Better was 13 exf5 with an interesting position; then Black should recapture with the bishop as 13...gxf5? 14 Bf4 looks great for White.

13...Qe7 14 Bf4 g5! (Diagram 67)

With this move Black neutralises White's control over e5, and therefore has a free hand to play on the queenside.

15 Bg3 f4!

The logical follow-up.

16 Bf2 b6!

Black needs to remove the knight from c4, so he can gain absolute control over e5.

17 Re1 Ba6 18 e5?!

I do not like this move much, which lets the inactive black pieces into the game without any troubles.

18 Na3!?! seems to be a lot better. The white knight can always return to c4 later to fight for the e5-square. However, Black still has a good game.

18...Bxc4! 19 exd6 Nxd6 20 Bxc4 Qd7 (Diagram 68)

21 Ba2

21 Bb3, with the idea of Bc2, was maybe preferable.

21...Rae8 22 Qd3 Kh8 23 Rxe8 Rxe8 24 Rd1 Bf6 25 Bb1 Re7 26 h3 Nce8 27 Bc2 Be5 28 Re1 Nf6 (Diagram 69)

Black was clearly better. That he did not win in the end was due to an instance of chess blindness, which sometimes hits all humans.

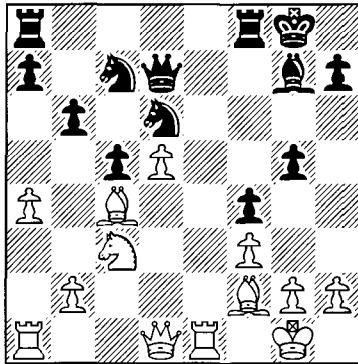


Diagram 68
Black is better here

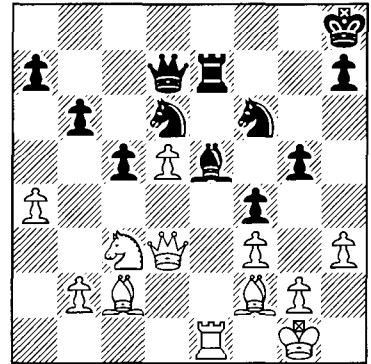


Diagram 69
Black is now clearly better

The advance ...f7-f5 looks like it should be a part of a kingside attack, but mainly it is a positional advance aimed at gaining influence in the centre. This can also be seen by a fabulous Ivanchuk performance in the famous Amber rapid and blindfold tournament in Monte Carlo. In this game Black uses the f-pawn's advance to secure the control over the e5-square or, at White's instigation, to disintegrate the white centre.

□ Kamsky ■ Ivanchuk
Monte Carlo (rapid) 1994

(Diagram 70) 18...f5!

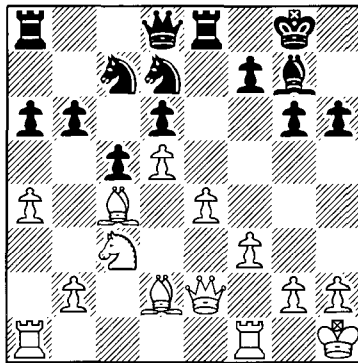


Diagram 70
Black gains space in the centre

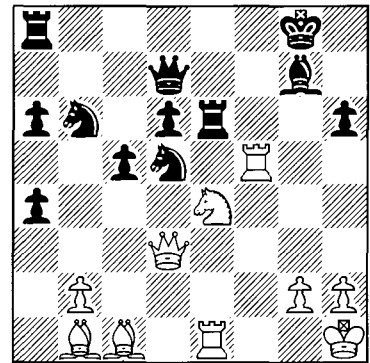


Diagram 71
What now for Black?

Black has achieved all the counterplay he wishes for on the queenside (...b6-b5 cannot be prevented for long) and therefore takes the chance to get going on the kingside.

19 Rae1 Ne5 20 Ba2 b5 21 Bb1 Qd7 22 Qf2 fxe4!

A sound positional decision. Now White will have to face ...b5-b4 as well as what to do about the knight on e5; after 23 fxe4 the black knight cannot be dislodged. 22...b4!? with the follow-up ...f5xe4 was equally strong.

23 Nxe4?!

This extra option should perhaps have been avoided. Now d5 is weak and the white knight does not seem to be going anywhere. 23 Bxe4 was probably best for White.

23...Nxd5?!

Black would like to claim that he has won a pawn and that it is difficult for White to show compensation. However, White can regain the pawn with simple tactics. Stronger was 23...Nc4! with advantage to Black, e.g. 24 Bxh6 Rxe4 25 Rxe4 Bxh6 and Black should be better because of 26 Rg4? Ne5! and White has no logical follow-up.

24 f4?

24 Rd1!, with the idea Bxh6, would have kept White in the game. Black has no way to avoid this so the position can best be described as unclear.

24...Nc4 25 Bc1 bxa4 26 Qg3 Re6 27 Qd3?!

27 f5 was the last try.

27...Ncb6! 28 f5 gxf5 29 Rxf5 (Diagram 71) 29...Rae8!

A nice tactic to conclude the game.

30 Rxd5 c4 31 Qd1 Nxd5 32 Qxd5 Qb5 33 Qd1 d5

Black is winning.

34 Bc2 Rxe4 35 Bxe4 Rxe4 36 Rf1 Qc6 37 h3 Qe6 38 Qd2 a3 39 bxa3 c3 40 Qf2 d4 41 Qg3 Kh7 42 Qd3 Qg6 43 Qf3 Re6 44 h4 Rf6 45 h5 Qc2 46 Bf4 Qf5 47 g4 Qc2 48 Rg1 Rf8 49 Rf1 Rf7 0-1

Piece Play

As mentioned several times already, the highest priority for Black in the Modern Benoni is active piece play. The structure is probably slightly better for White, as the central thrust e4-e5 seems more serious than ...b7-b5. But Black is compensated by having greater mobility and more active possibilities. Objectively White should probably be able to maintain the tiny edge which comes with being White, but nothing more.

In this section we will examine some recurring active possibilities Black has in the Modern Benoni.

The Advance ...g6-g5, Gaining Control over e5 and f4

Game 4

□ Yusupov ■ Lobron

Brussels (rapid) 1992

1 d4 e6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 g6 6 e4 Bg7 7 Nge2 Nf6 8

f3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bg5 h6 11 Be3 Qe7!

As we shall see, this is a cunning waiting move.

12 Nc1

12 Ng3 would generally be better, but here there is no time: since Black has not castled, 12...h5! would be very strong – White does not have the retreat Nh1, nor would 13 Bg5 make any difference.

12...Ne5 13 Be2 Rb8 14 0-0 0-0 15 h3?!

Preparing f2-f4, but even after 15 f4 Black has a good alternative to 15...Nfg4 with 15...Ned7! when White will find it increasingly difficult to defend the e-pawn. One obvious continuation is 16 Qd3 Re8 17 Bf3 Nxe4! 18 Nxe4 (if 18 Bxe4? Bxc3 and Black is basically winning) 18...f5 19 Nxc5 Qxe3+ 20 Qxe3 Rxe3 21 Ne6 Bxb2 and Black is a pawn up for very little compensation. The knight on e6 has no function and will soon have to vacate anyway.

15 Rb1! intending b2-b4 was a better idea. The text move only weakens the white position without anything to show for it.

15...g5! (Diagram 72)

This move is not only based on retaining the knight on e5, but also on regrouping the knights to exploit the weakness of f4 and maybe even g3.

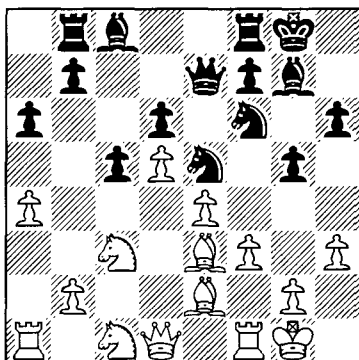


Diagram 72

Fighting for the dark squares

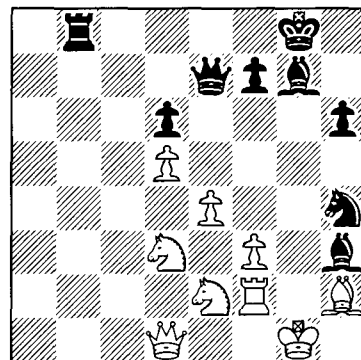


Diagram 73

Black to play and win

16 f4!?

White was already experiencing problems in this position, so I cannot see anything wrong with this decision. Also after 16 Rb1 Nh5! 17 Qe1 (17 b4 Ng3 18 Rf2 cxb4 19 Rxb4 Nxf3+ 20 Bxf3 Bxc3 must be bad for White) 17...f5 18 b4 c4 I would prefer Black; the knight on c1 just looks stupid.

16...gxf4

This is a very natural move, but I would prefer a more subtle approach. After 16...Ng6! 17 ffg5 (or 17 Qd3 gxf4 18 Bxf4 Nxf4 19 Rxf4 Nd7 and Black is better) 17...Nxe4 18 Nxe4 Qxe4 19 Qd2 hxg5 I cannot see why

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

Black is not simply better. Something like 20 Bxg5 Bd4+ 21 Kh2 Qxd5 must be preferable to Black.

17 Bxf4 Ng6 18 Bh2 b5!

Black plays on all strings. After 18...Nxe4 19 Nxe4 Qxe4 20 Bxd6 Bxb2 21 Ra2 Bd4+ 22 Kh1 it would be difficult to justify the loss of the exchange.

19 axb5 axb5 20 Bf3?

This move can only be explained by it being a rapid game. White holds on to a weak pawn, while his pieces are being driven into passivity. Better was 20 Nxb5! Nxe4 21 Qc2 f5 when Black has a good game, but White can still offer strong resistance. Now Black experiences something that can be compared to a power play in ice hockey.

20...b4 21 N3e2 Nh7!

21...Nh4!? was also interesting and strong, but the text move activates all the pieces and should therefore be preferred.

22 Nd3

Or 22 Qc2 Ng5 and White is also under attack.

22...Ng5

Black chooses to win on the kingside. Another way was 22...c4!? 23 Ndf4 Bxb2 and White does not have enough to justify the loss of a pawn.

23 Nxc5 Bxb2 24 Nd3!?

Giving Black extra options. Instead 24 Rb1 Bg7 25 Nd3 would have transposed to the game.

24...Bg7!

24...Bxa1!? 25 Qxa1 Nh4 was also strong, but Black decides to retain the bishop for now, as it is not clear that an endgame is certain, which is where material advantage would count.

25 Rb1 Nh4 26 Rxb4 Bxh3!

White is outplayed on the kingside, and there is no queenside left to win on. White is doomed.

27 Rxb8 Rxb8 28 Rf2 Ngxf3+ 29 gxf3 (Diagram 73)

It looks as if White has managed to fend off the first wave of attack, but with a tactical shot Black exposes the weakness of the white king.

29...Bd4!! 30 Ng3

The bishop is safe, since after 30 Nxd4 Qg5+ 31 Kh1 Bg2+ 32 Kg1 Bxf3+ Black wins the queen.

30...Ra8 31 Nc1 Bxf2+ 32 Kxf2 Qa7+ 33 Ke1

If 33 Ke2 Qa6+ 34 Qd3 Qxd3+ 35 Kxd3 Nxf3 also wins swiftly for Black.

33...Qe3+ 0-1

The ...g6-g5 advance is an unusual theme in the Benoni. The obvious weakness of the king and the f5-square make it necessary to have good control over your kingside before you can advance this pawn. The following example is a solid recommendation of when it is perfectly OK to do so.

□ Dreev ■ Kasparov
 Moscow (rapid) 1996

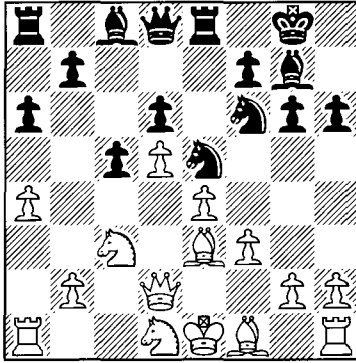


Diagram 74

Black wants the dark squares again

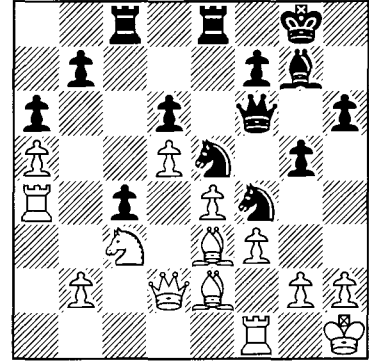


Diagram 75

Black has achieved his positional aim

14...g5! 15 Be2 Nh5 16 0-0 Qf6

Kasparov seems to prefer this plan over the ...f7-f5 advance. It is my opinion that Black has many good ways to play these positions.

17 a5 Nf4 18 Na4 Bd7 19 Ndc3 Bxa4 20 Rxa4 Rac8 21 Kh1 c4 (Diagram 74)

Black had good counterplay and eventually won.

Here is another Kasparov game with this structure:

□ Seirawan ■ Kasparov
 Skelleftea 1989

(Diagram 76) 13...Nh7!

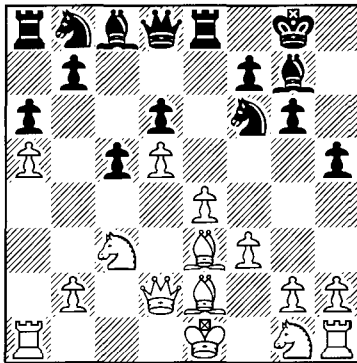


Diagram 76

Black plays on the kingside

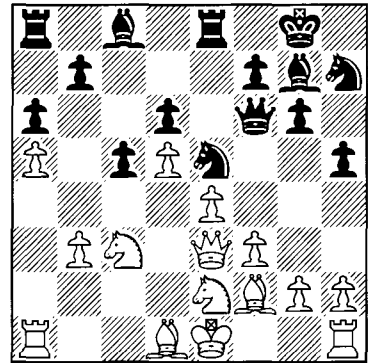


Diagram 77

Black will seize the dark squares

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

This was a new move at the time. Black decides to play on the kingside, so White has gained very little playing a4-a5 so soon.

14 Bd1

14 Na4? f5! 15 Nb6 Ra7 would gain little (Seirawan), while 14 Bd3 Nd7 15 b3 Ne5 16 Bc2 b5 17 axb6 Qxb6 also gives Black a good game.

14...Nd7 15 Nge2 Ne5 16 b3 Qh4+?!

Seirawan says that 16...f5 17 Bc2 fxe4 was the best strategy. After 18 Bxe4 c4 or 18...Nf6 he expresses a strong desire not to be White.

17 Bf2 Qf6 18 Qe3? (Diagram 77)

This is positionally flawed, as Black demonstrates with a fantastic grab of the kingside dark squares. White was not attracted to 18 0-0? Ng5! (but not 18...Qxf3? 19 Bxc5) and if 19 Kh1 Nexf3! White can resign. However, 18 Be3! would have secured a good game. Probably Black should consider playing 18...Qh4+ 19 Bf2 Qf6 with an immediate draw.

18...h4! 19 h3

Forced. Otherwise Black would play ...h4-h3 himself.

19...g5!

Now White can never gain full control over f4 with the pawns. His next strategy is to defend the square, so Black cannot simply occupy it with a knight and gain a strong attack.

20 0-0 Bd7 21 Kh1! Nf8!

Aiming at the f4-square.

22 Bg1! Nfg6 23 Bh2

Black has a good position. White has managed to create some defence, but if Black now played 23...Bb5, with the idea of ...Re7 and ...Rae8, he would have had a wonderful game. Instead he played the horrible **23...c4??** when the game became very complicated and good for White after **24 Rb1! Rac8 25 Qa7!** The game was later drawn after further mistakes from both players.

Handling the Light-squared Bishop

One of the major positional concerns for Black in the Benoni is that the light-squared bishop does not have any good square or diagonal. In some respects it looks like a good bishop because of the black pawns on d6 and c5, but the important pawns here are the ones on f7, g6, h7 and e4 and d5. The dark-squared bishops are the good pieces in this structure. The main way to deal with the light-squared bishop's lack of scope is to exchange it for a knight.

Game 5

Donner Tal

Zürich 1959

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Bd3 0-0 9 0-0

9 h3! has now been established as the main move here, in order to restrict the bishop on c8. After the text move Black is fine.

9...a6

9...Bg4 was fine as well.

10 a4 Bg4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Nbd7 (Diagram 78)

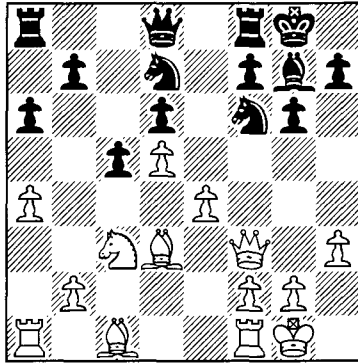


Diagram 78

Black has exchanged his bad bishop

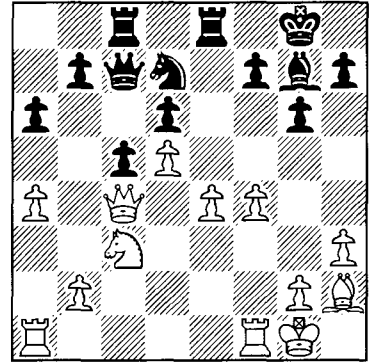


Diagram 79

The white position is close to collapse

13 Bf4

The bishop is on its way to h2, but there it will leave the centre undefended. Tal suggested it would have been better to play 13 Qe2 followed by 14 f4 with a decent position, though Black has nothing to fear.

13...Qc7 14 Qe2 Rfe8 15 Bh2 Rac8!

With the idea of ...c5-c4 and ...Nc5.

16 Bc4 Ne5

16...Nxe4? 17 Nxe4 f5 18 Nxd6 Rxe2 19 Nxc8 would have left White better off.

17 f4

It is easy to say this move is ugly. But 17 Bxe5 Rxe5 would also have been very strong for Black and prove the total success of his strategy. White's remaining bishop has no scope and his knight is rather passive too. Meanwhile Black will attack the white centre, both frontally with the rook, and from the sides with the queen, knight and bishop.

17...Nxc4 18 Qxc4 Nd7 (Diagram 79)

White's position is already close to collapse. We can clearly see that the bishop is not happy on h2.

19 Rfe1?! Qb6!

All the weaknesses in White's camp are visible now.

20 Rab1 Qb4 21 Qf1 c4!

Now the knight enters the position and White is left with no defence.

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

22 Re2 b5 23 axb5 axb5 24 Kh1 Bxc3

Once again Black parts with this bishop at the right moment and the white position falls apart.

25 bxc3 Qxc3 26 Rxb5 Qd3 27 Qe1 c3 28 Rb1 Nc5 0-1

White resigned because of 29 Qd1 Rxe4 30 Qxd3 Nxd3 31 Rxe4 c2.

Let us look at another great example from Tal of how the bishop is worse than the knight.

Game 6

□ Geller ■ Tal

USSR Championship, Tbilisi 1959

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 Bg5 a6 9 a4

This is hardly critical.

9...h6 10 Bf4

The white set-up here is a mismatch of different ideas and not truly dangerous for Black.

10...Bg4! (Diagram 80)

Black is happy to get rid of the bishop.

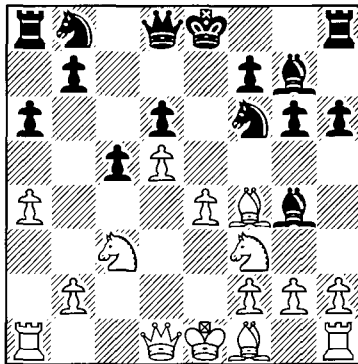


Diagram 80

Black will play ...Bxf3

11 Be2

11 Qb3!? was absolutely the only idea in the position. Black would probably respond 11...b6 followed by ...Ra7-e7 and play against e4 later on. If instead 11...Qe7? 12 Bxd6! Qxd6 13 Qxb7 Nxe4 (the only try) 14 Nxe4 Qe7 15 Qxe7+ Kxe7 16 0-0-0 White has a clear edge with his extra pawn.

11...0-0 12 0-0 Re8 13 Qc2

Not 13 h3? Nxe4!! 14 hxg4 Bxc3 winning a pawn, but 13 Nd2 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 Nh5! (the natural reaction against the threat of Nc4 with the bishop on f4) 15 Be3 Nd7 would give a balanced game.

13...Qc7 14 Rfe1 Nbd7

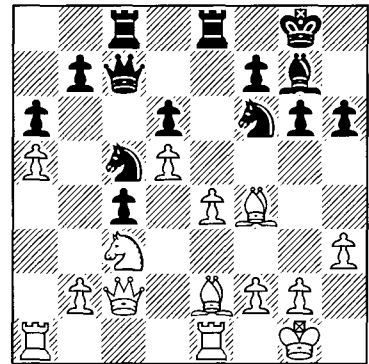


Diagram 81

Black solves his problems tactically

Tal has succeeded in getting the set-up as in the previous game (actually the current game was played first), while White has done nothing to improve his own position.

15 h3

This does not help White either. His pieces have found no scope.

15...Bxf3 16 Bxf3 c4 17 Be2 Rac8 18 a5

Black has completed his development and it is now time to do something.

18...Nc5! (Diagram 81)

This tactical solution to all Black's problems is not too hard to find.

19 Bxc4 Ncxe4 20 Nxe4 Rxe4 21 Rxe4 Nxe4 22 Qxe4 Qxc4

Whether White exchanges queens or not, he is positionally busted.

23 Qf3?!

23 Re1! was a better try. Black is better, but White can possibly still hold.

23...Qb4! 24 Qg3

White is seeking counterplay against d6, but he is too late.

24...Qxb2 25 Re1 Qb5 26 Qf3

26 Bxd6 Qxd5 27 Bc7 is hopeless for White. It is only a matter of time when the a-pawn will drop, if Black focuses his attention on attacking the kingside as well with 27...Bd4!.

26...Bf8!?

Tal seems to think that 26...Qxa5 27 Re7 would give White unnecessary counterplay. Black would still be winning, but there is no reason for him to make things difficult for himself.

27 h4?

27 Bd2 was the only move, though a pawn down and a passive position do not leave White with many survival chances.

27...Qxa5

Now it is just over.

28 Rb1 b5 29 h5

This attack can never create real threats against the black king, as White has no knight or light-squared bishop.

29...g5 30 Qg3 Qa2 31 Rd1 Qe2?!

31...Qa4! won a piece.

32 Rd3 Bg7 33 Qh3 Rc2 34 Bxd6 Rc1+ 35 Kh2 Qxf2 36 Rf3 Qg1+ 37 Kg3 Qe1+ 38 Kh2 Be5+ 39 Bxe5 Qxe5+ 40 Qg3 Qxd5 41 Rd3 Qc5 42 Qg4 Qe5+ 0-1

Generally White deals with the threat ...Bg4 by simply not allowing it. The main lines see White playing either Bd3 and h2-h3 or Nf3-d2-c4, in both cases preventing ...Bg4. Another set-up is Bd3 and Nge2, where ...Bg4 again becomes a non-move. However, if White does not keep a constant eye towards the possibility of e4-e5, then Black may opt for a rather time-consuming manoeuvre to rid himself of his obsolete bishop, via a6.

Game 7

□ Almeida ■ F.Gomez

Havana 2003

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 d6 6 Bd3 0-0 7 h3 e6 8 Nge2
exd5 9 cxd5 b6!/? (Diagram 82)

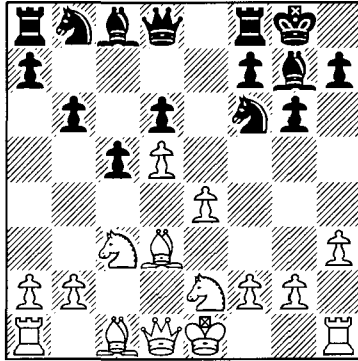


Diagram 82

The black bishop will emerge at a6

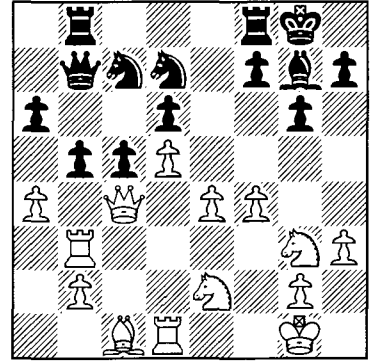


Diagram 83

Black has equalised

This way of developing the bishop makes a lot of sense.

10 0-0 Ba6 11 Ng3 Bxd3 12 Qxd3

Having rid himself of the bishop, Black can now start to develop the rest of his queenside to the right squares.

12...a6 13 a4 Nbd7 14 f4 Qc7 15 Qc4 Qb7 16 Ra3 Rab8 17 Rb3 Ne8!

Black insists on ...b6-b5, while at the same time taking full control over e5.

18 Rd1 Nc7 19 Nce2 b5 (Diagram 83) 20 axb5 axb5 21 Qc2 c4 22 Rf3
Nc5 23 f5 Nd3 24 f6 Bh8 25 Bh6 Ne5 26 Rf4 ½-½

There was no reason to take a draw here, but perhaps tournament tactics came into consideration,

Game 8

□ Knaak ■ Bönsch

German Championship, Plauen 1980

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Bd3 Bg7 8
Nge2 0-0 9 0-0 b6

Here White came up with a novel idea to meet the queenside deployment of the bishop.

10 a4! Ba6 11 Nb5! (Diagram 84)

White does not want to exchange the bishops under the proposed conditions.

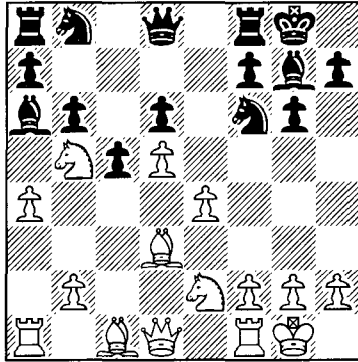


Diagram 84

White refuses to trade bishops

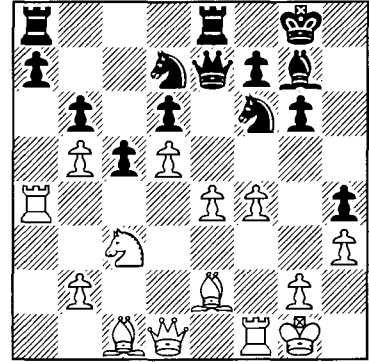


Diagram 85

Black has no counterplay

11...Bxb5?!

This seems wrong. But even after 11...Ne8 12 Nec3 White's position looks preferable.

12 axb5 Nbd7 13 Nc3 Re8 14 Ra4 Qe7

Now the game continued with **15 Bd2?!** and was later drawn. Afterwards Knaak suggested 15 f4 h5 16 h3 h4 17 Be2 (Diagram 85) followed by Bf3 as a stronger plan.

White will build up pressure against the a7-pawn and threaten e4-e5 followed by d5-d6, when the a8-rook might easily be hanging. Probably there is no easy way for Black to meet this, as counterplay against e4 seems unrealistic, and for once it is White who has all the play on the queenside.

It is very hard to determine when it is prudent to play ...b7-b6 and ...Ba6 for Black. The plan is rather time consuming and, meanwhile, the b8-knight is occupied with controlling a6, and cannot help with the prevention of White's main plan e4-e5.

Nevertheless, as the following game shows, even if these principally terrible events happen to Black, there may still be hope.

Game 9□ **Lependin** ■ **Lysyj**

TomsK 2003

1 d4 e6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Nf3 Nf6 7 h3 Bg7 8 e4 0-0 9 Bd3 b6!?

This is far from being theory's main choice here.

10 0-0 Ba6 11 Re1 Bxd3 12 Qxd3 a6 (Diagram 86)

13 a4?!

Stronger was 13 e5! with a slight advantage to White.

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

13...Nbd7 14 Bf4 Qc7

This would not have been possible without the inclusion of ...a6 and a4, as White would have had Nb5 winning.

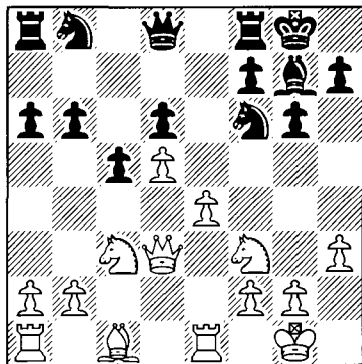


Diagram 86

Black's opening is a little slow

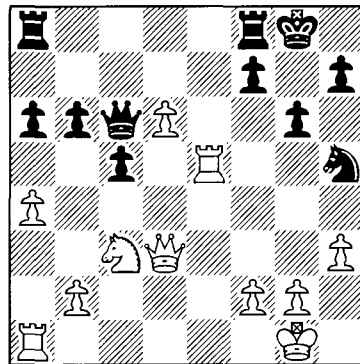


Diagram 87

How can Black win material?

15 e5!?

This is playable, though perhaps a little too ambitious. Obviously White had overlooked the tactic coming his way. Instead 15 Bh2 c4! would give Black good counterplay, but maybe 15 Qc4!? (as suggested by my computer) actually makes sense, despite looking so odd.

15...Nh5!

Of course. Black uses this tempo to improve his position.

16 Bh2 dxe5 17 d6 Qc6 18 Nxe5?

The correct way to continue was 18 Rad1 with compensation for the pawn. How the game would have ended then is hard to say. 18...f6!? is probably a good way for Black to try to hang on to his extra pawn, as White would give concessions if he played 19 g4 Nf4 20 Bxf4 exf4 21 Qc4+ Kh8 22 Qxf4; after something like 22...f5 23 g5 Rfe8 the game is unclear, but balanced.

18...Nxe5 19 Bxe5 Bxe5 20 Rxe5 (Diagram 87) 20...Qxg2+!!

A wonderful winning shot, easy to overlook from a distance.

21 Kxg2 Nf4+ 22 Kf3 Nxd3 23 Ke4?

This is rather desperate. Instead, after 23 Rd5 Nxb2 24 a5! White still has reasons to hope for a draw.

23...Nxe5 24 Kxe5 Rfd8 25 Kd5 Rac8 26 a5 Rb8!

Getting the rook into play. After 26...b5 27 Ne4 c4 28 Nc5 White is gaining counterplay.

27 Na4 bxa5 28 Kc6 Rdc8+ 29 Kd5 Rb4 30 Nxc5 Rxb2 31 Rd1 Rb5 32 Rc1 Kf8 33 d7 Rxc5+!

The easiest way to finish the game.

34 Rxc5 Rxc5+ 35 Kd6 Rd5+ 0-1

When Black should play ...b7-b6 and ...Ba6 is hard to say. It is generally a good plan when White cannot answer it with either Nb5 or e4-e5 as in the two preceding examples. Black will very seldom find joy in the two bishops.

Blockading with ...Ne5, ...dxe5 and ...Nd6

Another typical plan for Black in the Modern Benoni is to recapture on e5 with the d-pawn and place a blockading knight on d6. Obviously this needs to be well timed, or White will be able to push his d-pawn to d6 and create real problems for Black.

□ W.Arencibia ■ Gil.Hernandez
Matanzas 1992

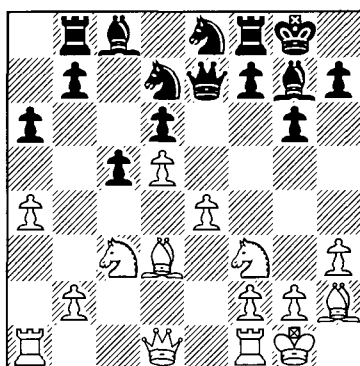


Diagram 88

How might a black knight reach d6?

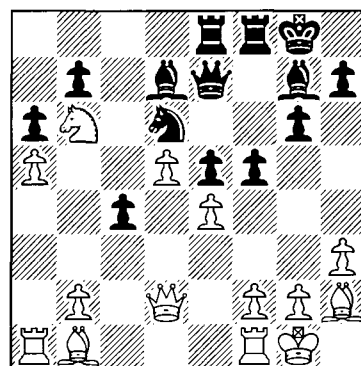


Diagram 89

Black has good counterplay

14...Ne5

The most logical way to proceed in this position, as otherwise the e8-knight would look silly.

15 Nxe5 dxe5 16 a5 Nd6

The point. The knight is wonderful here.

17 Qd2

Also interesting was 17 Qe2 f5 18 f4!? with an unclear position.

17...Bd7 18 Na4?!

The knight does not appear to be doing much at b6. 18 b3!? to prevent ...c5-c4 looks more reasonable.

18...c4 19 Bb1

19 Be2 Nxe4 is naturally out of question.

19...Rbe8 20 Nb6 f5 (Diagram 89)

Black had good counterplay and later won with a kingside attack.
In the next example we can see clearly how strong the knight is at d6.

Game 10

□ Pajeken ■ Reeh

Hamburg 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 0-0 9 Bd3 Nbd7

Not the main line, but Reeh, a solid IM working at *ChessBase*, has his own idea.

10 Bf4 Ne8 11 0-0 Ne5

Usually we would include ...a7-a6 and a2-a4 automatically. But here Black had realised this would benefit White. With the pawn on a6 White would have the possibility of ruining the structure with a4-a5, or force Black to play ...a6-a5, when b6 is at once weaker and a5 also likely to fall.

12 Nxe5

Otherwise Black will be happy to play ...Nxd3, eliminating the bishop, which is meant to suppress ...f7-f5 and ...b7-b5.

12...dxe5 13 Be3 b6 14 a4 f5 (Diagram 90)

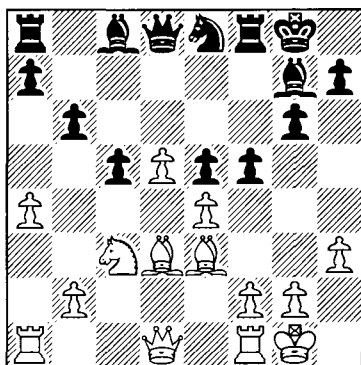


Diagram 90
Black assaults the centre

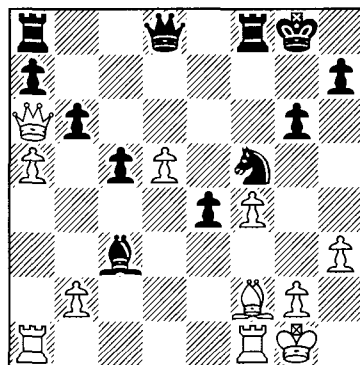


Diagram 91
Sometimes ...Bxc3 is a good idea!

15 f4?!

White should focus on the queenside. His loose pieces in the centre are actually less ready for the opening of the position than the black pieces on the back rank. We will see this in the forthcoming tactics.

a) 15 a5 also looks dangerous because of 15...f4 16 Bc1 f3! ruining White's kingside pawn structure, but the position is not completely clear as the black pieces are not targeting the white king at present.

b) 15 f3 was the most standard move, and after 15...Nd6, the position

seems to be fairly balanced.

15...Nd6

Also possible was 15...fxe4 16 Bxe4 Nd6 with good play.

16 exf5 Bxf5 17 a5 Bxd3

The most natural reply, even though White's bishop is not a strong piece. Also interesting was 17...e4!? 18 Be2 Bd7! with good play.

18 Qxd3 e4! 19 Qa6?

This is folly. The queen is simply out of play out here. Instead 19 Nxe4? loses at once to 19...Nxe4 20 Qxe4 Re8 21 Qd3 Rxe3! and White has lost a piece.

The best option was to go for an exchange sacrifice with 19 Qe2 Nf5 20 Rfd1! Nxe3 21 Qxe3 Bd4 22 Rxd4 cxd4 23 Qxd4 Rxf4 24 d6!? and White has a lot of counterplay. I am not even sure he is worse. For Black 20...Qd7! looks stronger; the white bishop on e3 is a weak piece, whereas Black's knight and bishop are so wonderful that it almost hurts to give them up.

19...Nf5 20 Bf2

20 Bd2 Bd4+ 21 Kh2 e3 is also hopeless.

20...Bxc3! (Diagram 91)

A wonderful bishop is exchanged for a not very impressive knight – but a complete collapse of the white position is the result. The game is practically over.

21 bxc3 e3 22 Be1 Qxd5 23 Qb5 Nd6 24 Qe2 Nc4 25 axb6 axb6 26 Rxa8 Rxa8 27 f5 Rf8 28 Bh4 Qe4 29 Be7 Rxf5 30 Rxf5 gxf5 31 Bd8 Nd2 32 Kh2 Qe5+ 33 g3 Qd5 34 c4 Qf3 0-1

These are, in my opinion, the main positional themes in the Modern Benoni. A mastery of these themes might take a lifetime, but knowledge of them will help you right from your next game!

Chapter Two

Rare Variations

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ Modern Benoni versus Catalan
- ▨ White Plays an Early Bg5
- ▨ White Plays an Early Bf4
- ▨ White Plays an Early h2-h3



Introduction

In this chapter we are going to look at the variations without e2-e4, which at the same time are not part of the main g2-g3 complex presented in the next chapter. These often involve the moves Bc1-f4 or Bc1-g5 combined with the manoeuvre Ng1-f3-d2-c4 to target the d6 pawn, which is undoubtedly a soft spot in the black position. While a lot of these lines have proved dangerous for Black in individual games, they can generally be considered theoretically harmless – which has little relevance to actual play, of course, beyond knowing that your position is basically sound and that you have a fair chance of leaving the opening OK.



TIP: In the Modern Benoni Black's structure will often leave him in danger of getting a positionally worse outcome from the opening, mainly associated with a quick e4-e5 from White, or a quick attack on d6. Therefore it is important for Black to keep his focus and play dynamically.

Modern Benoni vs Catalan

We will start with two games that transpose from the Catalan Opening and therefore present us with unique positions. Usually Black plays the solid 3...d5 against the Catalan, but obviously this is not to everyone's liking. The option to enter the Modern Benoni is very tempting and would in most cases transpose to the g3-system in Chapter 2, as I cannot see that White has a better square than c3 for his queen's knight. However, Black does have the extra option 6...b5!? which gives an active game, though is also somewhat risky.

Why Play the 6...b5!? Line with Black?

It is a way to achieve the desirable advance ...b7-b5 early on in the opening. Why not play ...b7-b5 when you have the chance? Well, as we shall see, it is not that simple and White has his options too. Most often 6...b5 is played by those not wanting to enter the Modern Benoni main lines, who were ready to play the Nimzo-Indian or Queen's Indian, but not the Catalan. However, for the Modern Benoni player who likes to trick his opponent with the 2...e6 move order, this is a nice alternative to the main lines.

Theoretical?

The line with 6...b5!? is not theoretical at all. The position still has somewhat of a closed nature, where there are so many possibilities that it is virtually impossible to analyse exhaustively. Positional evaluations are of higher importance.

Statistics

Black has an excellent score of 59% with 6...b5, winning almost every other game of the 158 in the databases. However, this is mainly when White plays inferior seventh moves. After 7 b4! Black scores 45% in 42 games, winning every fourth game and losing less than every second. This is a fairly normal score and should not put anyone off. According to general statistics Black will score 45% from the opening in any main line.

Game 11

□ Csom ■ Groszpetér

Hungarian Championship 1981

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3

Even against the Catalan it is possible to play the Modern Benoni.

3...c5 4 d5

4 Nf3 is a major alternative, transposing into the English Opening, which has little to do with this book.

4...exd5 5 cxd5 d6

If Black wants to secure his move order he can play 5...b5!? immediately (as in the next game). After the text White will usually take the chance for 6 Nc3, transposing to the g3 Benoni after 6...g6 7 Bg2 Bg7.

6 Bg2 b5!? (Diagram 1)

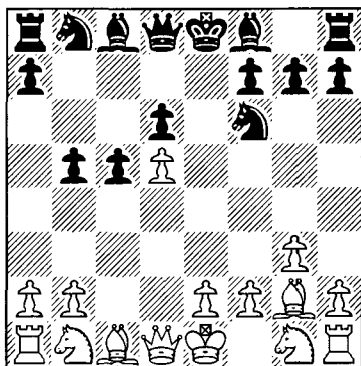


Diagram 1

Black plays a very early ...b7-b5

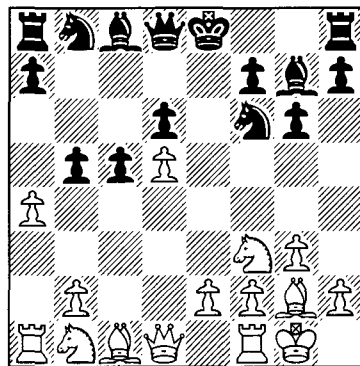


Diagram 2

This a2-a4 thrust is premature

This move separates the game from a standard g3 Benoni. Black uses the absence of 6 Nc3 to grab space on the queenside.

7 Nf3

7 b4 will be considered in the next game.

A lot of other moves have been played here. The most standard is probably 7 e4 though I am not sure that I like this much. If White does not get

to play e4-e5, Black will certainly get a lot of play on the light squares inside the white pawn chain. After 7...Nbd7 we have two examples of this line:

a) 8 Ne2 g6 9 b3 Bg7 10 Bb2 0-0 11 Qc2 Re8 12 0-0 a5 13 Nbc3 b4 14 Nd1 Ba6 15 Re1 Ne5 and Black was better in Manigodic-Van Wely, European Blitz Championship, Panormo 2002.

b) 8 f4 g6 9 Nh3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Nf2 Nb6 (Black uses his extra space on the queenside for an invasion with his knights) 12 Re1 Re8 13 Na3 Ba6! (at first this move seems anti-positional, as Black intends to play ...c5-c4, but later it becomes clear that the bishop is well placed on a6 and would be able to find no better square) 14 Nc2 Nfd7 15 Rb1 Na4! (to thwart b2-b3) 16 Ne3 Re8 17 Qc2 c4 18 Nf1 Ndc5 19 a3 (this decision could be discussed) 19...Nb3 20 Be3 Qa5 21 Bh3 Bxb2! (it is more important to get a passed pawn than to defend the rook) 22 Bxc8 Bxc8 23 f5 Bg7 (23...Nd4! looked even stronger here) 24 Nd2 Nac5 (around here White should have considered exchanging on g6, as soon becomes apparent) 25 Nf3 Qc3 (25...Qxa3!? was probably stronger) 26 Qd1? (26 Qxc3 Bxc3 27 Re2 gxf5 28 e5! was the last chance to stay in the game) 26...gxf5! 27 Bxc5 Nxc5 28 exf5 Rxe1+ 29 Nxe1 (if 29 Qxe1 Qxe1+ 30 Nxe1 a6 gives Black a much better endgame) 29...Bxf5 (now it is all over) 30 Rxb5 Bd4 31 Nf3 Bxf2+ 32 Kxf2 Nd3+ 33 Kg1 Be4 34 Rb1 Qf6 35 Qd2 Bxf3 36 Qe3 Bxd5 0-1 Lastin-Gelfand, Sochi 2004.

7...g6 8 0-0 Bg7 9 a4?! (Diagram 2)

White is trying to gain the c4-square for his knights. 9 e4 has also been played a few times: 9...0-0 (9...Nbd7! is probably best, though nobody seems to have played it. If 10 Bf4 Nxe4! 11 Re1 f5 and Black is better as 12 Ng5?! Bxb2 is not what White is searching for. 9...Nxe4!? 10 Re1 f5 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Nxe4 fxe4 13 Rxe4 is not necessarily bad for Black either) 10 e5 dxe5 11 Nxe5 Bb7 12 Nc6 Qb6 13 Ne7+ Kh8 14 Re1 Nbd7 (now Black is starting to become worse; 14...Re8 was probably better) 15 a4! Qa5 (15...b4 16 a5 Qb5 17 Nd2 is better for White as 17...Rfe8? 18 a6! Bxa6 19 Bf1 wins) 16 Bd2 b4 17 Na3 (17 Nc6! looked strong) 17...Nb6 18 Nc6 Bxc6 19 dxc6 Rad8 20 Qc2 c4? (after this Black is probably lost; necessary was 20...Nfd5!? with a fine position) 21 c7 Rd7 22 Nxc4 Rxc7 23 Nxa5 Rxc2 24 Bxb4 Rfc8 25 Bh3 Rg8 26 Bc3 and White is a pawn up. The rest needs no comments: 26...Nfd5 27 Bxg7+ Kxg7 28 b3 Nc3 29 Bf1 Rc8 30 Nc4 Nxc4 31 Bxc4 Rc6 32 Re3 Rd6 33 Bd3 Rb2 34 Bc4 Rc2 35 Bd3 Rd2 36 Rc1 R6xd3 37 Rxc3 Rd7 38 Rf3 Rb7 39 g4 a5 40 Rc5 Rb2 41 Rxa5 R7xb3 42 Rxb3 Rxb3 43 Rb5 Ra3 44 a5 h6 45 Kg2 f5 46 gxf5 g5 47 f3 Kf6 48 h3 h5 49 Kf2 Ke7 50 Ke1 Rxf3 51 a6 Ra3 52 Rb6 Ra5 53 Rh6 Rxf5 54 Rh8 1-0 Khenkin-Epishin, Bratto 2002.

9...b4



TIP: An important part of the Modern Benoni is the fight for White's favourite square c4. If Black, as here, is able to close the queenside and take control over the a1-h8 diagonal with the support of his pawns, as well as prevent White from occupying c4, he may be on his way to a very good position.

10 Nfd2

10 Nbd2 Ba6 11 Re1 0-0 12 e4 was another way to play, though Black should not be unhappy here; after 12...Re8 13 Qc2 Nbd7 White has problems developing. It is through lines like this that it becomes clear that 9 a4 did not help White at all.

10...Ba6 11 Qc2 0-0 12 Nc4 Re8 13 Re1

13 e4 was possible, when Black should probably continue 13...Qe7 (13...b3!? 14 Qxb3 Nxe4 looks tempting, but after 15 Nba3 it is not clear that Black has good play; 15...Nd7 16 Re1 f5 17 Bf4 looks better for White to me) 14 e5 b3 15 Qxb3 Bxc4 16 Qxc4 Qxe5 and Black is doing well. The bishop on g2 does not look very good in this position.

13...Bxc4!

Before White can reinforce c4 with the other knight.

14 Qxc4 a5 (Diagram 3)

To play ...Nd7-b6 without having to worry about a4-a5.

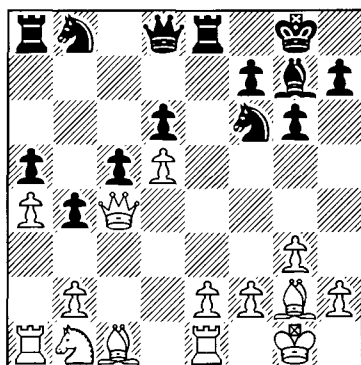


Diagram 3

The g7-bishop is very powerful

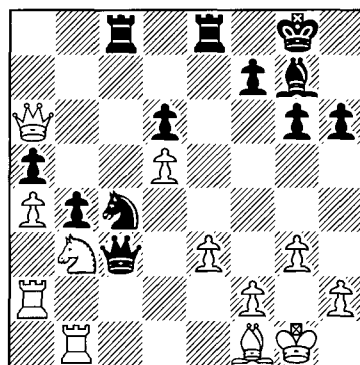


Diagram 4

Black can win material

15 Bg5

White is struggling to maintain equality. After 15 b3 Black has many tempting moves. One is 15...Ne4!? 16 Ra2 f5; another is simply 15...Ra7!? with the plan of ...Rae7 before developing the knight. A point here is that Black is not restricted by his 'extra' bishop. If instead 15 Ra2 Nbd7 16 b3 Nb6 17 Qd3 c4! 18 bxc4 Nfd7 favours Black since White will struggle to protect his weaknesses. 19 Be3 is forced and after 19...Ne5 20 Qb3 Nexc4 21 Bf4 Rc8 Black's play is easier.

15...h6 16 Bxf6

A questionable decision. It is easy to see the difference between the bishop on g2 and the one on g7.

16...Qxf6 17 Ra2 Nd7 18 Nd2

18 b3 was possibly better. White is struggling, but still in the game.

18...Nb6 19 Qd3

19 Qb5 Reb8! gives White a difficult position, as after 20 Qc6 b3! the white position would collapse.

19...Rac8 20 Qa6?

I cannot understand what the queen is doing at a6. 20 b3!? Qc3 21 Qb1 seems more logical. After this White would only be slightly worse.

20...Qd4 21 b3

The only move. 21 Nf3? Qxd5 obviously does not work, while 21 Nb3 Qc4 is also very bad for White.

21...c4!? 22 e3?!

Instead 22 Qxa5 (22 Nxc4? Nxc4 23 bxc4 b3 leaves White in serious difficulties) 22...c3 23 Nf3 Qxd5 24 Qxd5 Nxd5 looks better for Black at first, but now the g2-bishop is in play. Therefore it is better to avoid taking on d5 and play 23...Qc5!! 24 Qxc5 dxc5 25 a5 c4!! 26 Rb1 cxb3 27 Rxb3 c2 28 Rxc2 Rxc2 29 axb6 Rc1+ 30 Bf1 Bc3 and Black is probably winning.

22...cxb3 23 Nxb3 Qc3 24 Rb1 Nc4 25 Bf1 (Diagram 4)

25 Nxa5 b3! was Black's brilliant idea. After 26 Nxb3 Ra8 27 Qb7 Rab8! (27...Reb8 28 Qc6 Rc8 29 Qb5 is only a draw, and if 29...Rab8? 30 Rc1! White even wins!) 28 Qc6 Rec8 29 Qa6 and now the best move (found by the computer of course) is 29...Rc5!! (29...Qd3?! 30 Rc1!! Qxb3 31 Rac2 Qb6 32 Qxb6 Nxb6 33 Rc6! gives White unnecessary counterplay) 30 Rab2 Rc7 31 Re2 Rxb3 and Black has won a piece for very little.

25...Nxe3!

White was probably hoping for 25...Na3?! 26 Rc1!, though after 26...Qxb3 27 Rxc8 Rxc8 28 Qxc8+ Kh7 the position is still tenable for Black.

26 Rc1

If 26 fxe3 Qxe3+ 27 Rf2 (not 27 Kh1? Qe4+) 27...Rc2 forces 28 Be2 and Black can regain the piece at will. 28...Bc3 looks a useful insertion.

26...Qxb3 27 Rxc8 Rxc8 28 Qxc8+ Kh7

Compared with the 25...Na3?! line above, Black is simply a pawn better off and his knight is better placed.

29 Re2

29 Rd2 Nxf1 30 Kxf1 Qb1+ 31 Kg2 b3 wins easily for Black. White cannot defend the b1-square.

29...Nxf1 30 Kxf1 Qxd5 31 Re7?

When you are worse... attack! No, I do not think so. 31 Re1 b3 32 Kg1 might still offer a little resistance, though Black would probably have won all the same.

31...b3 32 Qb7 Qc4+ 33 Kg2 b2 34 Re1 Qc1

Why the rush? 34...Qxa4! was even more decisive.

35 Qe4 d5 36 Qb1 Qc4 37 Qd1 d4 38 Qb1 d3 39 Rd1 Qc6+ 40 Kg1 Qxa4 41 Qxd3 Qa1 0-1

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

The a-pawn comes forward to help the b-pawn and it is all over.

The following game gives a good impression of how Black can get into trouble in this line, but if you look carefully in the notes, you will also find the medicine. A key idea behind 7 b4! is to fight for the d4-square and thereby also the c6-square (for a white knight). In this game White is successful in achieving this objective, but if you follow Kasparov's Black game instead of his White game, you will see that everything is all right.

Game 12

□ Kasparov ■ Korchnoi

London (match) 1983

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 b5 6 Bg2

In a later game with White Korchnoi tried 6 a4 b4 7 f3 g6 8 e4 Bg7 9 Nd2 (not 9 e5? Qe7! 10 f4 Bb7 11 Bg2 d6 and the white centre is collapsing) 9...0-0 10 Nc4 d6 11 Bf4 (11 Bd3!?) 11...Ba6! 12 Qd2 (also possible was 12 Qc2!? Bxc4 13 Bxc4 Nh5 14 Bd2 f5 15 exf5 gxf5 16 Ne2 with unclear play) 12...Bxc4 13 Bxc4 Qe7 and Black was fine in Korchnoi-Timman, Tilburg 1987.

6...d6 7 b4! (Diagram 5)

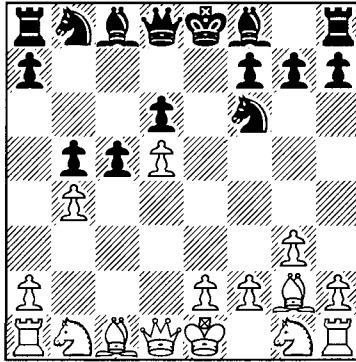


Diagram 5

White fights for control of d4

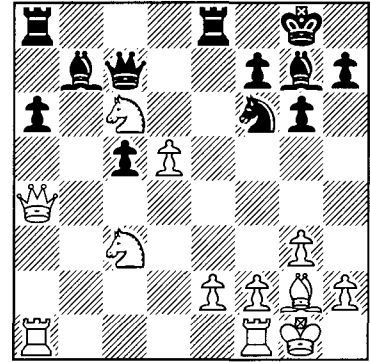


Diagram 6

Black is in difficulties

7...Na6!?

a) 7...cxb4?! 8 a3 bxa3 9 Nxa3 gave White the initiative in Zaichik-Vladimirov, Krasnoyarsk 1981.

b) 7...Nbd7 may be best: 8 bxc5 dxc5 9 Nh3 Bd6 10 0-0?? (10 Bf4 would probably transpose) 10...0-0?? (a crazy mutual oversight; 10...Be5 wins) 11 Bf4 Nb6 12 Bxd6 Qxd6 13 Nf4 Re8 14 a3 Bd7 15 h4 h6 and Black has a great position with a lead in development and a better pawn structure. The game concluded 16 Nd2 g5 17 hxg5 hxg5 18 Nh3 Bxh3 19 Bxh3 Nbx5 20 Rc1 Rad8 21 Bg2 c4 22 a4 a6 23 axb5 axb5 24 Nf3 Ne4 25 e3 Ndc3 26 Qe1 Qd3 27 Nd4 Rxd4 28 exd4 Ne2+ 29 Kh2 Nd2 0-1

Kasimdzhanov-Kasparov, Batumi (rapid) 2001.

8 bxc5 Nxc5 9 Nf3 g6 10 0-0 Bg7 11 Nd4 0-0?

11...Bb7 was necessary.



TIP: Tactics are often thought of as something accompanying attacks, but just as often they can be used to achieve a positional aim. Black's mistake here was not a positional mistake, but a tactical mistake with positional costs.

12 Nc3! a6

Black has no choice. After 12...b4 13 Nc6 Qd7 (13...Qb6 14 Rb1 is bad) 14 Nb5! (14 Nxb4 Nfe4! is not what White is looking for) 14...Nfe4 (14...Nxd5 15 Qxd5 Bxa1 16 Nxd6! Ne6 17 Nxc8! Qxd5 18 N8e7+ and White wins) 15 Nbd4 Nc3 16 Qc2 Ba6 17 Re1 White has consolidated with a very strong knight on c6 aiming at the b4-pawn, which will give Black a sore head.

13 Nc6!

13 a4 b4 14 Nc6 Qd7 is not the same as before.

13...Qc7 14 Be3 Bb7 15 Bd4

Also possible was 15 a4. Either way, White has the advantage.

15...Rfe8

15...Nfd7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qd4+ followed by 18 a4 is good for White as well.

16 a4! bxa4

16...Bxc6 17 dxc6 b4 18 Bxf6 does not work for Black, and neither does 16...Nxa4 17 Nxa4 bxa4 18 Rxa4 Nxd5 19 Bxd5 Bxc6 because of 20 Rc4!.

17 Bxc5 dxc5 18 Qxa4 (Diagram 6)

Black is in a bad fix. Once White vacates the long diagonal with the a1-rook, the g7-bishop will be obsolete.

18...Nd7 19 Qb3

Threatening d6, but standing rather in the way. Instead 19 Qa3! Bf8 20 Rab1 followed by Rfd1 would give White a strategically winning position.

19...Bxc6! 20 dxc6 Nb6 21 Rab1 Rab8?

Black chooses the middlegame, as it is not easy to see a direct way forward for White. Instead 21...c4!? 22 Qxb6 Qxb6 23 Rxb6 Bxc3 24 Bd5 Rxe2 25 Bxc4 Rc2 26 Rb7!? would have given White great chances to win the endgame, but there are still some technical difficulties ahead.

22 Qa3 c4

Black had no defence in the tactics: 22...Bd4 23 e3 Nc4 24 Nd5!? (24 Rxb8 Qxb8 25 Qxa6 Bxc3 26 Qxc4 also looks very strong) 24...Nxa3 25 Nxc7 Nxb1 and after 26 exd4 Rec8 27 Nxa6 Rb2 28 Nxc5 White is probably just winning. Instead 26 Nxe8?! is less clear after 26...Be5! (the only move; if 26...Rxe8?! 27 exd4 Nc3 28 d5 and White wins, and 26...Nd2? 27 Nd6! is no better) 27 f4 Nc3 28 fxe5 Rxe8 29 Ra1 Nb5 30 Rxa6 Rxe5 31 Bf1 Nc7 32 Ra7 Re7 and Black seems to survive.

23 Rfc1 Bxc3 24 Qxc3

Even though the computer assesses the position as equal, White is completely winning here.

24...Rxe2 25 Qd4!

Planning to break the blockade with Qd6 or Rxb6.

25...a5?

The only move was 25...Re5! and after 26 Re1!? Rb5 27 Rbd1 (threatening 28 g4! followed by 29 Qf6) Black must play 27...h5!. White is still better after 28 Re2! Kh7 29 Rde1 Rd8 30 Qa1! when the invasion is coming, but this was Black's last hope to fight off the coming attack.



TIP: Many players, because of a loss of confidence, stop fighting before their position is truly without any practical hopes. If you study even World Championship Final games, you will see terrible unforeseen blunders and accidents. So if you continue to give your opponents problems to solve, many of them will make mistakes even in very favourable positions.

26 Rb5

Now Black is collapsing.

26...a4 27 Bf3 Ree8 28 Qc5! Qe7 29 c7 Qxc5 30 Rxc5 Rbc8 31 Bb7 Nd7 32 R5xc4 1-0

White Plays an Early Bg5

The next game is a characteristic Benoni game, in which the 'son of sorrow' was not Black but my chess colleague who lives only 1500 metres from my flat. The game shows a treatment of the line with an early Bg5 and a knight manoeuvre to c4 which cannot help but impress.

Again I would like to remind the reader to pay attention to the active play from Black, and how he would rather develop his pieces than frantically defend the d6-pawn.

Why does White Play Nf3-d2-c4 and Bg5?

This is an attempt to kill Black's opening tactically, or at least to force him into a passive position, which is more or less the same thing. Theoretically speaking, it is not really dangerous for Black, but that is not so relevant when White uses it as a surprise, and the aggressive play with which Black should answer is also somewhat risky.

Theoretical?

Actually, in my opinion, there are not that many lines in the Modern Benoni which are very theoretical. And this is not one of them. Often it is more a matter of understanding and attitude. Black needs to play actively and needs to know how to do so. Beyond that there are a few key ideas and that is it.

Statistics

The position after 7 Nd2 Bg7 8 Nc4 0-0 9 Bg5 h6 10 Bf4 scores very well for White with 62% in 176 games, with White winning half of them. However, this is a mirage. After 10...Na6!? the score is down to 50% (though in only 8 games) and it is the unrated players who drag Black down to that level. Between the stronger players Black is for preference.

After 7 Bg5 Bg7 8 e3 h6 9 Bh4 White has an acceptable score of 55% in 102 games, but if we only look at the 16 games between the highest rated players, Black scores a reassuring 53% despite being rated, on average, 50 Elo points lower. So this line should not be considered as statistically dangerous for Black.

Game 13

□ Petran ■ Barczay

Zamardi 1980

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 Nd2 Bg7 8 Nc4 0-0 9 Bg5 h6 10 Bf4 Na6!? (Diagram 7)

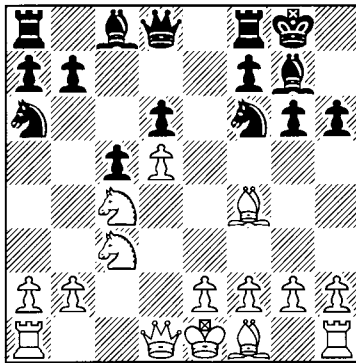


Diagram 7

An interesting pawn sacrifice

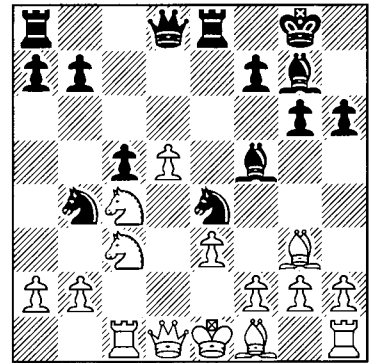


Diagram 8

A surprising black cavalry charge

This is a very interesting pawn sacrifice. 10...Ne8 is more passive and not in the spirit of the Modern Benoni.

11 Bxd6

Not 11 Nxd6?? Nh5! and Black wins a piece.

11...Re8 12 Bg3

12 e3!? is probably more testing, but I think Black is OK after 12...Ne4 13 Nxe4 Rxe4 14 Bg3 b5 15 Nd2 Rb4 16 b3 and now:

a) 16...c4?! 17 Rc1 c3 18 Nb1?! (18 Nf3! was stronger, after which I fear for the black position) 18...Qa5 19 Rc2 (19 Nxc3 Bxc3+ 20 Rxc3 Rc4! is OK for Black) 19...Re4 20 Bd3 Bg4 21 Qc1 Ree8? (21...Re7!? looked better) 22 Qa3 Qxa3 23 Nxa3 Nb4 24 Bxb5 Nxc2+ 25 Nxc2 Red8 26 Bc6 gave

White a clear advantage in Kotic-Kluss, Caorle 1989.

b) 16...Qa5! 17 Be2 Bb7 should be OK for Black. After 18 0-0 Bxa1 19 Qxa1 Bxd5 White's compensation is not extraordinary, as Black can answer 20 Qf6 by either 20...Re8 and 20...Qb6!? with good play.

12...Nb4 13 e3

13 Nd6 is also possible, but Black will reply 13...Bf5! 14 Nxf5 gxf5 15 e3 (15 d6 Ne4! gives Black good play as well) 15...f4!? 16 Bxf4 Nfxd5 and White is in trouble. Even worse is 14 Nxe8? Nc2+ 15 Kd2? Nxd5! 16 Nxd5 (if 16 Nxc3 Nxc3+ wins, or 16 Nd6 Nxc3 17 bxc3 Qa5 with a winning attack) 16...Qxd5+ 17 Kc1 Qxd1+ 18 Kxd1 Rxe8! with a great advantage for Black due to 19 e4 Bxe4! 20 Rc1 Rd8+ 21 Ke2 Bxb2 22 Rd1 Nd4+ 23 Ke3 Bc2 and Black is simply a sea of pawns ahead.

13...Bf5 14 Rc1 Ne4!! (Diagram 8)

14...Nfxd5 was the obvious move, but rather dull. The text move is more ambitious, and as I cannot see a good defence for White after this, I have to conclude that it is simply brilliant.

15 Nxe4 Bxe4 16 a3!

16 Nd6 was the critical test, but after 16...Qa5! 17 Qd2 Bxb2!! White is down the drain, e.g. 18 Rc4 Bxd5 19 Nxe8 Rxe8 20 Rxb4 Qxb4 with a winning endgame to come.

16...Nxd5

16...Na2!? was a weird alternative leading to unclear play after 17 Ra1 Nc3 18 bxc3 Bxc3+ 19 Nd2 Bxa1 20 Qxa1 Bxd5, though this is hardly worth the risk.

17 Be2

17 f3 Bf5 18 e4 was given as the best chance in the original annotations by Meleghegyi. He also gave the strongest reply, though misjudging it a little bit: 18...Bd4! (18...b5? 19 Nd6 Bxb2 20 Qxd5! is good for White) 19 Qd2 (19 Be2 b5! 20 Nd6 Ne3 21 Qd2 Nxc2+ 22 Kf1 Be3 23 Qc3 Bh3 24 Nxe8 Qxe8 gives Black a strong attack) 19...Bxe4! 20 fxe4 Rxe4+ 21 Be2 Re6! and the threat of ...b7-b5 is very strong. White may be a piece up, but as the rook on h1 cannot get into play, he is in fact an exchange down in the play for his own king's future.

17...Bxc2 18 Rg1 Bh3 19 Bf3 Bd4! 20 Qb3

If 20 Be2 b5! 21 exd4 (or 21 Nd6 Nxe3! 22 fxe3 Rxe3 and White collapses) 21...bxc4 22 Rxc4 Bg4 23 Be5 (or 23 Rc2 Qa5+!) 23...Bxe2 24 Qxe2 cxd4 25 Rxd4 Rc8 and there is no way White will be able to survive the attack.

20...b5

20...Qg5!? was perhaps even stronger.

21 Nd6? (Diagram 9)

21 Qxb5 was the only move. Black would probably continue 21...Qg5! (21...Nxe3 22 fxe3 Bxe3 23 Nxe3 Rxe3+ 24 Be2 Qd4 25 Bf2 Rd8 26 Bxe3 Qxe3 only leads to perpetual check after 27 Qxc5! Qd2+ 28 Kf2 Qf4+ 29 Ke1 etc.) 22 Bxd5 (if 22 Rd1 Nxe3 23 fxe3 Bxe3 with a winning attack)

22...Qxd5 and the position looks very dangerous for White.

Now Black has a very nice combination.

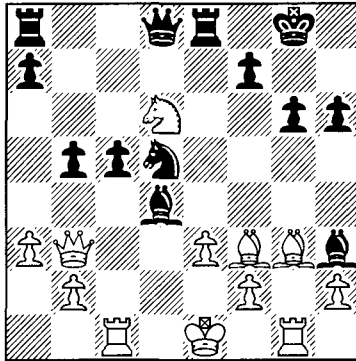


Diagram 9
Black to play and win

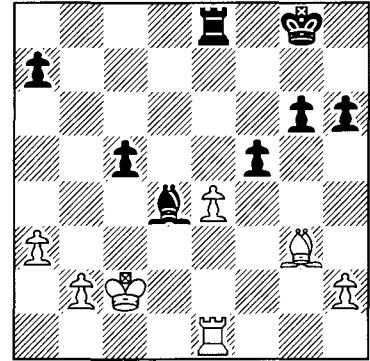


Diagram 10
Black wins easily

21...Bxe3!! 22 Qxd5 Bxc1+ 23 Kd1

23 Nxe8 Qxe8+ 24 Be5 Kh7! would not give White a realistic chance of saving the game either, e.g. 25 Qd6 Bxb2 26 Bxa8 Bxe5 (26...Qxe5+ 27 Qxe5 Bxe5 is also grand) 27 Bc6 Qh8! 28 Qxc5 Bc7 with a winning attack.

23...Be6! 24 Qxa8 Bg5!

The key move. If 25 Qxd8? Bb3 is mate.

25 Kc2 Qxa8 26 Bxa8 Rxa8

White has no chance in this endgame.

27 Nxb5 Rd8?!

There is no reason to sacrifice the a-pawn.

28 Nd6

28 Nxa7! was the last chance. 28...Bd7!? 29 Bc7 Bf5+ 30 Kc3 Rd7 31 Bb6 Bf6+ 32 Kc4 Bxb2 is clearly better for Black, but there is still some fighting going on.

28...Bf6 29 Ne4 Bd4 30 Rd1 Bf5 31 f3 Re8 32 Re1 Bxe4+ 33 fxe4 f5! (Diagram 10)

The simplest win.

34 exf5 Rxe1 35 Bxe1 gxf5 36 b4 f4 37 Kd3 f3 38 Bg3 Kf7 39 b5 Ke6 40 a4 Kd5 41 a5 c4+ 0-1

The following game is another cool treatment of the early Bg5 system by a future World Champion, though he finishes the game far from his later peak. Here White decides to play the bishop to h4 to provoke Black to weaken his pawn structure with ...g5. The payoff for Black is that he is allowed to exchange his knight for the bishop.

Game 14

□ Grigorian ■ Kasparov

Baku 1980

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 Bg5 Bg7 8 e3 h6 9 Bh4 g5

9...a6 is more standard (see the next game).

10 Bg3 Nh5 (Diagram 11)

This is a standard reaction. The weakening of the f5-square is not so critical that it cannot be justified by exchanging White's powerful bishop.

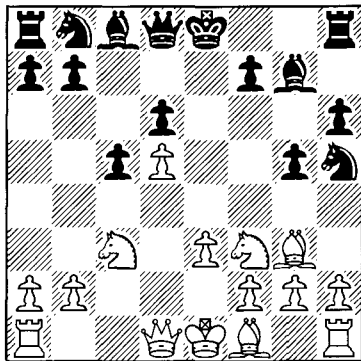


Diagram 11

Hunting the dark-squared bishop

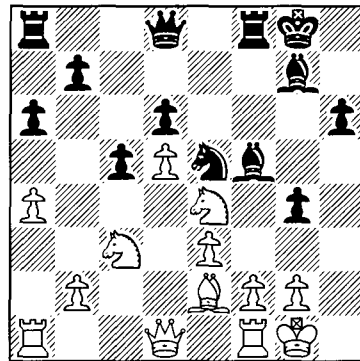


Diagram 12

Black has a powerful attack

11 Nd2?!

11 Bb5+!? is possible. In the next game we will look at 11 Bd3, albeit with ...a7-a6 and a2-a4 interposed.

11...Nxc3 12 hxg3 a6 13 g4?

This move is a loss of time and allows Black to open up the kingside.

TIP: Do not move your pawns on the side of the board where you are weaker.



13 a4 has also been played. Now Portisch showed brilliant play in this somewhat dusty, but still very relevant game: 13...Nd7 14 Be2 b6 15 Nce4 Nf6 16 Nxf6+ Qxf6 17 Bg4 0-0 18 Bxc8 Raxc8 19 Ra2 c4 20 0-0 Qg6 21 e4 f5 22 Qe2 b5 23 axb5 axb5 24 g4 fxe4 25 Nxe4 Rce8 26 f3 h5 27 Qd2 hxg4 28 Qxg5 Qxg5 29 Nxg5 Ra8 30 Rfa1 Rxa2 31 Rxa2 b4 32 Ne6 b3 33 Ra4 Rc8 34 Nxg7 Kxg7 35 Kf2 Kf6 36 fxg4 Ke5 37 Ke3 Kxd5 38 Ra5+ Rc5 39 Ra6 c3 40 bxc3 Rb5 0-1 Stahlberg-Portisch, Havana 1964.

13...Nd7 14 a4 Ne5 15 Be2 0-0 16 0-0 f5 17 gxf5 Bxf5 18 Nde4 g4! (Diagram 12)

An excellent positional decision that highlights White's problems with his kingside. According to Kasparov Black is already clearly better here.

19 Ng3 h5!

Black should make the position as uncomfortable for his opponent as possible. This means disturbing the defensive knight on g3. Kasparov said 19...Qh4!? was also strong, when White has the following choices:

- a) 20 a5?! Bd7 21 Nce4 Bb5! and after ...Bxe2 comes ...Nf3+! winning.
- b) 20 Nce4!? Rad8 21 Nxf5 Rxf5 22 Ng3 Rf7 23 e4 Nf3+!! 24 Bxf3 (or 24 gxf3 Bd4 and it is all over) 24...gxf3 with a very strong attack.
- c) 20 Qb3! Rf7 21 Nce4 Rd8 22 Nxf5 Rxf5 23 Ng3 Rf7 24 e4 Qg5 (not now 24...Nf3+?? 25 gxf3 Bd4 26 fxg4!) 25 Nf5 Qf4 when White is under attack, but has good chances because of the strong knight on f5.

20 Nxf5

If 20 Nxf5 Qh4 21 Nf4 Rf6 22 g3 Qh7 23 Kg2 Bc2! 24 Rh1 Bxd1 25 Rxh7 Bxe2 26 Rxg7+ Kxg7 27 Nxe2 Rh8 with a winning position.

20...Rxf5 21 Ne4 Rf7?

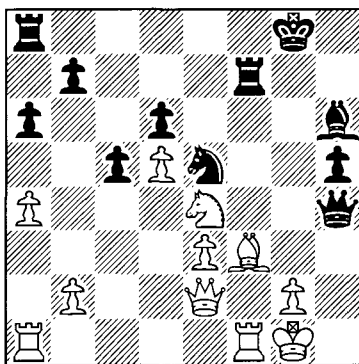
This wastes time. Kasparov indicated the better move, 21...Bh6!, which introduces a new piece on the kingside and prevents White's desired f2-f4. After 22 Ng3 Rf7 23 e4 Qh4 24 Nf5 (or 24 Ra3 Bf4 and White is in trouble) 24...Rxf5 25 g3 (if 25 exf5 g3! wins) 25...Qh3 26 exf5 Be3!! 27 fxe5 Qxg3+ 28 Kh1 Qh3+ 29 Kg1 g3 30 Rf2 gxf2+ 31 Kxf2 Qxf5+ and Black is a pawn up with a continuing attack.

22 f4!

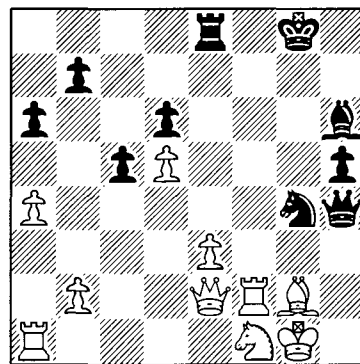
Now the position is less clear.

22...gxf3 23 Bxf3 Bh6!

Attacking White where he is weak. If instead 23...Qh4 24 Qe1! and the game is going White's way.

24 Qe2 Qh4 (Diagram 13)**Diagram 13**

Confusing complications

**Diagram 14**

Black has a simple win

25 g3

25 Nxd6!? Rf6! 26 Ne4 was an alternative. Now after 26...Nxf3+ 27 Rxf3 Rxf3 28 gxf3! (if 28 Qxf3 Rf8 29 Qg3+ Qxg3 30 Nxc3 Bxe3+ 31 Kh2 and White is suffering somewhat; note that 31 Kh1? loses to 31...Rf4!) 28...Kh8 29 Qh2! the position is unclear.

25...Rg7?

25...Nxf3+ 26 Qxf3 is equal according to Kasparov, which seems true after 26...Rxf3 27 gxh4 Raf8 28 Rxf3 Rxf3 29 Ra3 Rxe3 30 Nxd6.

26 Rf2!

26 Bg2?! Rxc3! 27 Nxc3 Qxc3 28 Ra3 (not 28 Qxh5? Bxe3+ 29 Kh1 Kg7 and Black wins) 28...Ng4 29 Rf3 Qh2+ 30 Kf1 Qe5 gives Black a lot of play for the exchange, besides the small comfort of a pawn as well.

26...Re8?

26...Rf8 27 Bg2 Rxf2! 28 Qxf2 Qe7 was strongest, when White is still under some attack.

27 Bg2!

If 27 Bh1? Nd7! 28 Rh2 (28 Bg2! is still better) 28...Rxe4 (after 28...Rxc3+ 29 Nxc3 Qxc3+ 30 Qg2 Bxe3+ 31 Kf1 Rf8+ 32 Ke2 Rf2+ 33 Kd1 White probably keeps the balance in the endgame) 29 Rxh4 Rxh4 and Black has a strong attack for his queen.

27...Rxc3 28 Nxc3 Ng4??

Kasparov must surely have overlooked his opponent's beautiful defence. Instead 28...Qxc3! was correct with good compensation. After 29 Qxh5 Re7! 30 Qxh6 Qxf2+ 31 Kxf2 Ng4+ 32 Ke2 Nxc3 33 Bh3 a draw is not unlikely.

29 Nf1?? (Diagram 14)

TIP: Involve all your pieces in the defence!



Here White falls apart for no reason. After 29 Nf5 Qh2+ 30 Kf1 Bxe3 31 Ra3!! he would have been winning. Nothing else succeeded though: 31 Bf3? Qxf2+ 32 Qxf2 Bxf2 is good for Black because of 33 Bxc4 hxc4 34 Kxf2 Rf8!, while 31 Re1?? Nxf2 32 Nxe3 Nh1!! gives Black a winning attack.

29...Bxe3 30 Nxe3 Qh2+ 0-1

White resigned, as he will lose the queen after 31 Kf1 Ne3+ 32 Ke1 Nc2+.

The following way of handling the Modern Benoni doesn't cause too many problems for Black, and has gone completely out of fashion. However, I believe that it would do you good to play through the different sidelines – to get a feeling for how Black can quite easily create problems for himself if he is not careful.

Game 15

□ Ghinda ■ Stefanov

Romanian Championship 1982

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 Bg5 h6 8 Bh4 Bg7 9 e3 a6 10 a4 g5 11 Bg3 Nh5 12 Bd3!

White aims at the downside to Black's expansive manoeuvre.

12...Nxc3 13 hxc3 Nd7 14 Qc2 Qe7 15 Bf5

This way of playing is sensible from White's side, though it does not give Black many problems.

15...Ne5

15...Nf6 has also been played and is fine.

16 Bxc8

16 a5!? (16 Nd2 c4! is not what White wants) is perhaps the most aggressive approach from White, and then 16...Bxf5 17 Qxf5 Nc4!? is the way to go as Black here, e.g. 18 Qc2 (18 Ra2!? b5 19 axb6 Nxb6 also looks fine, but not 18...Nxb2?? 19 Qc2!) 18...b5 19 axb6 Nxb6 with unclear play.

Instead Tukmakov-Agzamov, Yerevan zonal 1982, saw 17...Qd7?! 18 Qc2 0-0-0 (18...Nxf3+ 19 gxf3 0-0 20 f4! apparently did not appeal to Black) 19 Nxe5 Bxe5 20 Na4 Kb8 21 Nb6 Qe7? (21...Qb5! was much better; after 22 Nc4 Qb4+ 23 Ke2 f5 24 Ra3 Qb5 the position is only slightly better for White) 22 g4 Bg7 (22...h5!? 23 gxh5 g4 24 Ra4! was also better for White) 23 Nc4 Qd7 24 f3 h5 25 Rxh5 f5 26 0-0-0 and White was on the way to a full point.

16...Rxc8 17 Qf5 Rb8! (Diagram 15)

The more aggressive try; Black will not enter the safe haven of an equal endgame just yet. I think this is right as the white knights are harmless in the middlegame, but can play tricks with the bishop in the endgame. Nevertheless, 17...Qd7 18 Qxd7+ Nxd7 19 Nd2 c4 20 Ke2 f5 21 a5 Bxc3 22 bxc3 Nf6 23 Ra4 Nxd5 24 Rc1 Kd7 25 Rxc4 Rxc4 26 Nxc4 h5 27 Nd2 Rc8 28 c4 b5 29 axb6 Nxb6 30 Ra1 Nxc4 31 Nf3 Rb8 32 Rxa6 Rb2+ 33 Kd1 Rb1+ 34 Ke2 Rb2+ was drawn in Yuferov-Kindermann, Naleczow 1984.

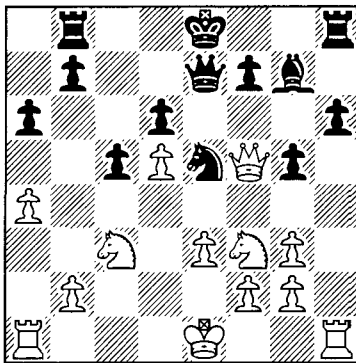


Diagram 15

Black plays for the win

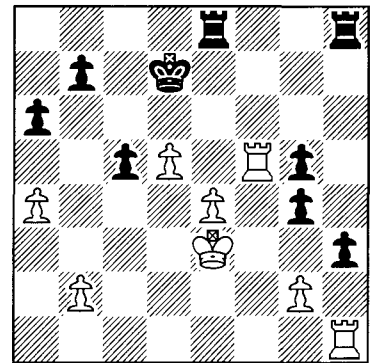


Diagram 16

The black infantry break through

18 Nd2? Qd7! 19 Nce4?!

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

19 Qxd7+ Kxd7 20 Ke2 f5 is better for Black, but still White's best option here.

19...Ke7!

With the threat of ...Qxf5.

20 g4?

Totally needless. White just loses a pawn. Instead he could still struggle after 20 Qxd7+ Kxd7 21 Ke2 f5 22 Nc3, even though the position after 22...Rhe8, with the idea of ...Ng4-f6 as one aggressive option, favours Black.

20...Nxc4

Now Black is just much better. 20...Nd3+! 21 Ke2 Nxb2 looked even more convincing.

21 Qxd7+ Kxd7 22 Nc4 Be5! 23 f3

This was surely what White was counting on, but Black has a strong reply.

23...f5! 24 Nxc5+

24 fxg4 fxe4 25 Nxe5+ dxe5 does not give White much of a chance White either. The black king is very active and Black is a pawn up.

24...dxc5 25 fxg4 Bg3+ 26 Ke2 fxg4 27 e4

Two connected passed pawns in the centre might look impressive, but these two are not decisive.

27...Rbe8 28 Kd3 h5 29 Ne3 Bf2! 30 Rac1

Necessary. If 30 Nf5 c4+! and Black wins outright.

30...Bxe3 31 Kxe3 Kd6

31...h4!? was possible, though hardly as strong, since after 32 Rxc5 h3 White has the shocking reply 33 Rh2! and things are not that bad for him.

32 Rcf1 h4 33 Rf6+ Kd7 34 Rf5

34 Rf7+ Re7 is no improvement.

34...h3! (Diagram 16) 35 Rxc5

If 35 gxf3 Rxf3+ 36 Rxf3 gxf3 37 Rxc5 Rh8 38 Rg1 h2 39 Rh1 Kd6 and the rook endgame is completely winning for Black, e.g. 40 Kf4 Rh4+ 41 Kf5 b6 42 b3 b5 43 axb5 axb5 44 Kg5 Rxe4 45 Rxh2 Re3 46 Rb2 Kxd5 and the white king is decisively cut off.

35...hxc2 36 Rg1 Rh3+! 37 Kf4

The best chance was probably 37 Kd2!?, though Black should win after 37...Rxe4 38 Rxc2 Rxa4 39 R5xc4 Rxc4 40 Rxc4 Kd6 41 Rg7 Rb3.

37...Rf3+! 38 Kxc4 Rf1 39 Rxc2

39 Rg7+ Kd6 40 Rg6+ Kc7 41 Rg7+ Kb6 would only delay the inevitable.

39...Rxe4+ 40 Kh5 Rh1+ 41 Kg6 Rxa4

Now it is all over. The white king is too far away.

42 Rf2 Re1 43 Kh5 Rae4! 0-1

White Plays an Early Bf4

In the next game we will see a rather eccentric attempt to disrupt the black development with an early check from the white queen. In some variations this check might be dangerous, but the current game is not one of them. Topalov's play as Black is powerful and attractive; during the game all his pieces found their job. Generally the queen check on a4 is only troublesome if interposing a black knight would mean that the d6-pawn is left hanging. Then Black can be caught in a bad position.

Statistics

After 7 Qa4+ White has a great score: 66% in 41 games. This would normally be a very bad sign, but for us only the best black moves are relevant, so it is more important to look at the score after Topalov's 7...Nbd7 8 Bf4 a6!. Then we find that Black suddenly has a 56% score from 9 games. Statistics in chess are a tricky business.

7 Bf4 is not such a pleasant system for Black. After the strongest reply, 7...a6, White still has a score of 55% from 708 games, and this goes up to 57% when we consider the top 20 highest rated games. But then again, statistics cannot be the full story. Looking through the games themselves, I feel completely reassured about the black position and would not hesitate to take it on in a tournament game.

Game 16

□ Azmaiparashvili ■ Topalov

Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2003

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 d6 5 Nc3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 Qa4+

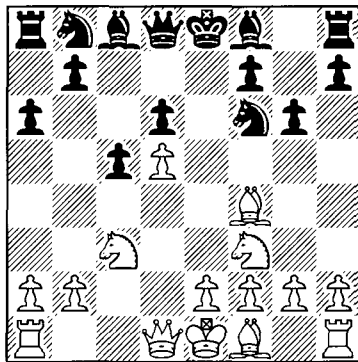


Diagram 17
White plays 7 Bf4

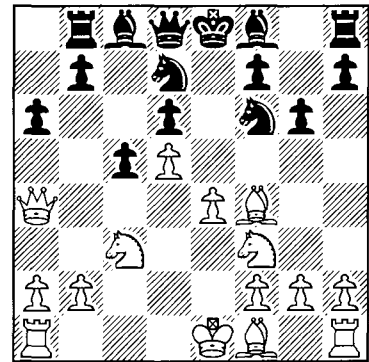


Diagram 18
...b7-b5 will follow

This check fails to impress. Black is sufficiently well co-ordinated to meet it with natural developing moves.

7 Bf4 is best answered with 7...a6 (**Diagram 17**) (7...Bg7?! runs into 8 Qa4+! which is now quite annoying) and then:

a) 8 e4 and 8 a4 Bg7 9 e4 are considered in Chapter 6 (Games 38 and 39).

b) 8 Qa4+ does not work here, as after 8...b5! 9 Nxb5 Bd7 10 e3 Qb6 11 Bg5 Ng8! (not the only move; I just like such stupid-looking moves when they make sense) 12 Qe4+ Be7 13 Na3 Qxb2 14 Nc2 h6 15 Bxe7 Nxe7 Black has good play.

c) 8 Ne4!? Nxe4 9 Qa4+ is a surprising version of the check, but Black is fine after 9...Nd7 10 Qxe4+ Be7! 11 Bxd6 Nf6 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Qxe7+ Kxe7 as the white d-pawn cannot be defended. Dreev-Lputian, Lvov 1987, continued 14 Rc1 b6 15 Ne5 Nxd5 16 g3 Be6 17 Bg2 f6 18 Nc4 b5 19 Na5 Rac8 20 0-0 c4 21 Rfd1 Rhd8 22 a3 c3 with a strong queenside initiative.

d) 8 a4 Bg7 9 h3 0-0 10 e3 Qe7 11 Nd2 Nbd7 12 Be2 (this sort of set-up is hardly dangerous for Black) 12...Rb8 13 0-0 Ne8 14 Bh2 f5!? (a good way of preventing White from using the e4-square, while allowing the e8-knight to go to the queenside to help with the advance ...b7-b5) 15 Qb3! Nc7?! (Black continues with his plan, but allows a strong advance for White; instead 15...b6! 16 Nc4 Rf6 followed by ...Nc7 was the right way to continue, after which Black would have no problems) 16 Nc4 Ne5 17 Qb6! (thwarting Black's long-planned advance) 17...Rd8 (better was 17...Nxc4 18 Bxc4 Rf6 and now White is a little better after 19 a5 or 19 Qxc5!? dxc5 20 d6+ Be6 21 dxe7 Bxc4 22 Bxc7 Re8 23 Rfd1) 18 Rfd1 (here White misses 18 Bxe5! Bxe5 19 Nxe5 dxe5 20 Rfd1! with a clear edge, e.g. 20...Na8 21 d6 Nxb6 22 dxe7 Re8 23 Rd6 is murder, or 20...Qd6 21 a5 and it is a difficult life for Black) 18...Na8 19 Qa7 with an unclear game in Deshmukh-Marin, Calcutta 1999.

e) 8 Nd2 b5 9 a4 b4!? (my recommendation, but the alternative is also OK: 9...Nh5 10 Be3 b4 11 Nce4 f5 12 g4 fxg4 13 Nc4 Be7 14 Bh6 Ra7 15 Bg2 Bf5 16 Ng3 was unclear in Lputian-Marin, Bled Olympiad 2002; possibly 14 Bg2 threatening Nxc5 is stronger, but not 13 h3? Be7 14 hxg4 Bxg4 15 Bh6 Nd7 16 Qc2 Ne5 with a great position for Black in Sjödin-Wedberg, Stockholm 1992) 10 Nce4 Nxe4 11 Nxe4 Bf5 12 Ng3 Qf6 13 Qd2 Be7 14 e4 Bc8 15 h4 Nd7 16 Be2 h5 17 a5 Ne5 18 Bg5 Qg7 19 Bxe7 Kxe7 20 f4 Ng4 21 Bxg4 Bxg4 22 0-0 Qd4+! 23 Qxd4 cxd4 24 Rfc1 Rhc8 25 Kf2 b3 26 Rc6 Bd7 27 Rac1 Bxc6 28 dxc6 Rab8 29 Ke2 Rb5 30 Kd3 Rc5 31 Rxc5 dxc5 32 Kc4 Kd6 33 e5+ Kxc6 34 Ne4 d3 35 Nd2 Rd8 36 Kxb3 Kb5 37 Kc3 Rd4 38 g3 Kc6 39 Nf3 Rd8 40 Kd2 Kb5 41 Ng5 Rd7 42 Ne4 Kc4 43 Nd6+ Kd4 44 b3 Rd8 45 Nxf7 Rb8 46 e6 c4 47 bxc4 Rb2+ 48 Ke1 Ke3 49 Kf1 d2 0-1 Lputian-Psakhis, ACP Blitz 2004. Though this was an internet blitz game, it is still a very convincing way for Black to deal with this kind of early attempt on his life.

7...Nbd7 8 Bf4 a6 9 e4 Rb8 (Diagram 18)

White has completely failed to prevent ...b5. Now Black adopts a different move order than usual, but still without any problems.

10 h3?

It is possible to understand this move: White wants to retain his bishop

on the diagonal in case of ...Nh5, so that Black will have to defend d6 before he develops. However, Black will get much more benefit from ...Qe7 than White from h2-h3.

10...b5 11 Qc2 Qe7 12 0-0-0

It is already hard for White to develop naturally. We very rarely see White castle queenside in the Modern Benoni, and for a good reason!

12...Bg7 13 Re1 0-0 14 g4?!

This is simply too slow. White has no credible way to attack the black king, while the black attack almost plays itself. Stronger was 14 e5 dxe5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Rxe5 Qd8 17 Be2 trying to play in the centre, although I still like the black position. For instance, 17...b4 18 Nd1 b3! appears to be very dangerous for White.

14...Nb6

Opening lines with 14...b4!? 15 Nd1 b3! was also a strong plan. Topalov decides on first including all his pieces.

15 Bg2 b4 16 Nd1 a5 17 Ne3

17 e5 Nfxd5 18 exd6 might look promising at first glance, but after 18...Qd7 19 Bg3 c4! 20 Kb1 b3! 21 axb3 cxb3 22 Qxb3 a4 23 Qd3 Black has many promising ways to continue the attack, one being 23...Bb7.

17...Nfd7

Simple chess. White is about to lose all his punch in the centre.

18 Bg5

This seems useless, but what should White do? 18 h4 is too slow after 18...c4!, with the point 19 Nxc4 b3! 20 axb3 Nxc4 21 Qxc4 Nc5 22 Re3 Ba6 and White is busted.

18...f6 19 Bf4 Ne5 20 Nd2 Ba6 21 Bf1 c4! (Diagram 19)

The attack is getting closer.

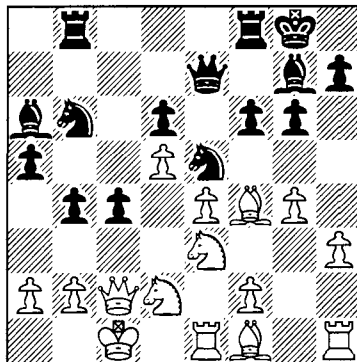


Diagram 19

The black infantry fix bayonets

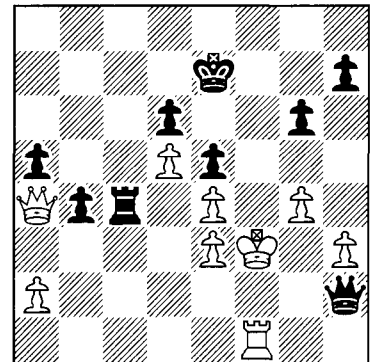


Diagram 20

All White's pawns will drop off

22 Bxe5 fxe5 23 Bxc4 Rbc8 24 Rhf1 Bh6!

Topalov is one of the best players in the world with the initiative – and generally as well. Kramnik once described him as the perfect player. Here he brings the bishop into the attack and exposes White's problems in full.



TIP: Include all your pieces in your attacks!

25 b3 Nxc4 26 Ndx4

26 bxc4 was last try, though after 26...Qh4 27 f3 Rc5 White will not hold out either.

26...Bxc4 27 bxc4 Qa7 28 Kd2

28 Kb1 a4 followed by ...b4-b3 is very clear.

28...Qd4+ 29 Ke2

White could also choose to lose with 29 Qd3 Rxc4 30 Qxd4 exd4 31 Kd3 Rc3+ 32 Kxd4 Bg7+ 33 e5 Rf4 mate.

29...Bxe3?!

This is OK, but not really necessary. Instead, after 29...Rf4! 30 Rd1 Qxe4 Black will get a rook endgame, which is easier to win than a queen endgame.

30 fxe3 Rxc4 31 Rxf8+ Kxf8 32 Rf1+ Ke7 33 Qa4?

33 Qb1 Qc5 34 Kf3 Rc2 35 Rf2 Rxf2+ 36 Kxf2 should have been tried, even though Black should win after 36...Qc4! followed by ...a4 and ...b3.

33...Qb2+ 34 Kf3 Qh2! (Diagram 20)

Now it is all over.

35 Rf2 Qxh3+ 36 Ke2 Qxg4+ 37 Kd2 Qh4 38 Rf1 Qxe4 0-1

White Plays an Early h2-h3

In all the previous examples (save the first two) it has been White who deviated from the main lines of the Modern Benoni. In the next game it is Black that tries to circumvent the most fashionable variation. The colourful grandmaster from Romania, Mihai Suba, prefers to avoid the h2-h3 and Bd3 system (see Chapter 5), and throws in ...Qe7!? to disrupt White's plan. This is only possible because he follows the 2...e6 3 Nf3 c5 move order, not afraid of defending the Nimzo-Indian if required. Suba has played this line in a dozen or so games with reasonable success.

Statistics

Black has an acceptable record with the 8...Qe7 system, scoring 44% of the points over 128 games. This is generally as close to a standard percentage as you can come. If one game had gone differently the score could have been better for Black – or worse. It is when many games go wrong we should start to pay attention. Statistics are not a fine instrument.

Game 17

□ Bellon Lopez ■ Suba

Malaga 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 d6!?

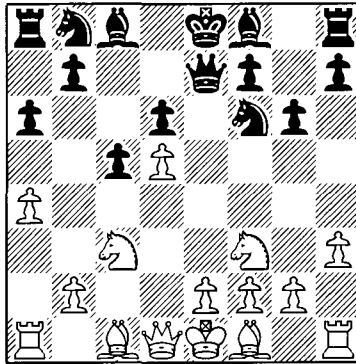
A special Suba move order to avoid 4...exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4.

5 Nc3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 h3

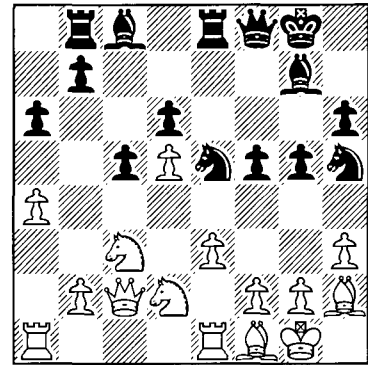
7 e4 a6 8 a4 allows 8...Bg4, as we shall see later.

7...a6 8 a4 Qe7!? (Diagram 21)

This is the idea. Now White cannot get the h2-h3 and Bd3 set-up, since he has not yet played e2-e4.

**Diagram 21**

Black avoids the h3, Nf3, Bd3 system

**Diagram 22**

Black can hardly be worse

9 Bg5

The alternative 9 Bf4 is similar to 7 Bf4 a6 8 a4 in the notes to the previous game, and can even transpose after 9...Nbd7 10 e3 Bg7 11 Be2 0-0 12 0-0 Rb8 13 Nd2. Instead White has tried 13 Re1!? aiming for a main line type (e2-e4) position after all, albeit a tempo down. Then 13...Ne8 14 e4 Ne5 15 Nxe5 Bxe5 16 Bh6 (if 16 Bxe5 Qxe5 17 Qd2 f5!? with counterplay) 16...Ng7 17 f4 Bd4+ 18 Kh2 was Borovikov-Suba, Halkidiki 2002, and here Kapengut suggested 18...Bf2!? 19 Rf1 Qh4 20 Qd3 f6 21 f5 gxf5 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 exf5 Re8 24 g3 Qd4 25 Qf3 Be3 when Black is even slightly better.

9...Nbd7

This is the correct way to develop. The following example was nothing but luck. 9...Bg7 10 e3 h6 11 Bh4 0-0 12 Be2 Bf5?! (just because this is possible does not mean it is a good move – the bishop only gets in trouble here; 12...Nbd7 would be Suba's move, and more standard) 13 Nd2 g5 14 Bg3 Nbd7 15 Nc4 Ne8 16 Bg4! (16 h4!? looks strong as well) 16...Bxg4 17 hxg4 Ndf6 18 f3 Nd7 19 Ne4 f5 20 gxf5 Rxf5 21 Nexd6 Nxd6 22 Bxd6 Qf7 23 e4 Re8 24 Ne3 Bxb2 25 Nxf5 Qxf5 26 Rxh6?? (26 Rb1 Bc3+ 27 Ke2 Qf6 28

Bg3 would have won easily; 27...Rxe4+ 28 fxe4 Qxe4+ 29 Kf1 Qf5+ 30 Kg1 is no good either) 26...Nf6 27 g4 Nxg4! 28 Re6 (desperation, but 28 Kd2 Rxe4 29 fxe4 Qf2+ 30 Qe2 Qd4+ 31 Ke1 Nxb6 32 Rb1 Bc3+ 33 Kf1 Qf6+ also leaves White in trouble) 28...Rxe6 29 dxe6 Qxe6 30 Qd5 (or 30 Rb1 Bc3+ 31 Ke2 Qc4+ 32 Qd3 Qa2+ with mate to come) 30...Qxd5 31 exd5 Bxa1 32 fxg4 c4 (this endgame is of course winning for Black) 33 Be7 Kf7 34 Bxg5 b5 35 axb5 axb5 36 Kd1 b4 37 Bd2 b3 38 g5 Be5 39 Kc1 c3 40 Be3 Kg6 41 Kb1 Kf5 42 g6 Kxg6 0-1 Lautier-Khalifman, Dubai (rapid) 2002.

10 e3 h6

Black should never allow the white bishop to restrict his space or possible movement.

11 Bh4 Bg7

It is very difficult to theorise about a non-confrontational line such as this. If you analyse two possibilities in these positions, you will be ignoring at least five on most moves. It is more important to get a good feeling of where the pieces belong and then to play them there.

12 Bd3

Suba has also faced 12 Be2 0-0 13 0-0 g5 14 Bg3 Ne8 15 e4 (more or less forced, otherwise Black plays ...f7-f5) 15...Rb8 16 Qc2 Nc7 (the chances are level; from here on it is man vs. man) 17 a5 b5 18 axb6 Rxb6 19 Ra5 Re8 20 Nd2 Ne5 21 f4 gxf4 22 Bxf4 Rb4 23 Nf3 Bd7 24 Qc1 Reb8 25 Ra2 Nb5 26 Bxb5 Bxb5 27 Nxb5 Nd3 28 Bxd6 Nxc1 29 Bxe7 Nxa2 30 Nc7 Rxe4 31 Nxa6 Rb6 32 d6 Rxa6 33 d7 Ra8 34 d8Q+ Rxd8 35 Bxd8 Re2 36 b3 Rc2 37 Rf2 Rc1+ 38 Kh2 Nb4 39 Re2 Rc3 40 Re8+ Kh7 41 Bb6 Nd3 42 Re7 Rxb3 43 Ba7 Kg6 44 Nh4+ Kf6 45 Re3 Bf8 0-1 Rodriguez Vargas-Suba, Linares 1994. Obviously White did not have to lose, but it was a game and not a forced theoretical line.

12...0-0 13 0-0 Rb8 14 Qc2 Re8 15 Rfe1 Qf8!

A standard manoeuvre in these positions. The queen might look silly here, but at least it is out of harm's way and it will support advance on the kingside. 15...b6!? was also possible, to force White to play e3-e4.

16 Nd2 Ne5

Once this is allowed, Black naturally cannot refrain.

17 Bf1 g5 18 Bg3 Nh5 19 Bh2 f5 (Diagram 22)

It is hard to believe that Black should be worse here.

20 Be2 Nf6 21 f4

21 Bxe5!? is a typical *Fritz* idea. After 21...Rxe5 22 Bd3 White has some pressure against f5. and the computer recommends solving this with an exchange sacrifice: 22...Nxd5 23 Nxd5 Rxd5 24 Bc4 Be6 with compensation, though none of this is forced.

21...gxf4!

21...Ng6 22 fxg5 hxg5 23 Bd3! would give Black serious problems with the f5-pawn now the f-file is open.

22 exf4 Ng6 23 g4!?

White is a very aggressive grandmaster, not afraid to test his opponent. Instead 23 Bd3 Nh5! gives Black sufficient counterplay: 24 g3 Bd4+ 25 Kg2 Ne7 is a balanced mess, where Black will try to get the c8-bishop into play with ...b7-b6 and ...Bb7.

23...Bd7 24 g5 hxg5

24...Ne4! with even chances was possibly stronger.

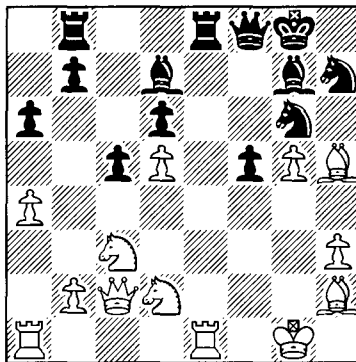
25 fxg5 Nh7 26 Bh5? (Diagram 23)

This is rather naive and gives Black a strong attack for free.

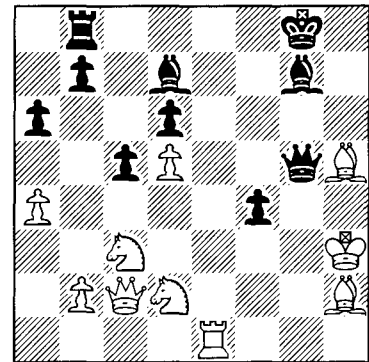
TIP: You should not think that the opponent will necessarily play according to your plans. Realise that he will take any option you give him to depart from your ideas into his own territory.

White should have preferred 26 Nf3! Bd4+ 27 Kg2 Re3 28 Bg3 Rbe8 29 h4 with a solid position and maybe even better chances.

Instead 26 Nc4 looks very active, but Black will again have a very strong attack against the white king, e.g. 26...Nxc5 27 Bxd6 Bd4+ 28 Kh1 Qh6 29 Bxb8 Nxc3 30 Bf3 Rxb8 31 Re2 Nf2+ 32 Kg1 Ng4+ 33 Kf1 Qh3+ 34 Bg2 Qg3 and White is lost.

**Diagram 23**

What should Black do now?

**Diagram 24**

The black attack is decisive

26...Nxc5!!

After this the attack cannot be stopped.

27 Bxc6 Rxe1+ 28 Rxe1 Qf6 29 Bh5

If 29 h4 Nh3+! and Black has won at least a pawn, as 30 Kg2 Qxc6+ 31 Kxh3 Qg4 is mate.

29...Nxh3+ 30 Kg2?

This walks straight into the attack. It was better to attempt damage control with 30 Kf1!, when after 30...Qh4 31 Re2 Qxh5 32 Bxd6 Black certainly has good attacking chances, but the game is still not decided. I like

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

the look of 32...Re8 33 Rxe8+ Bxe8 34 Ne2 b6 and White is struggling to keep his position together. But compared to the game, where it is all over, this is paradise for White.

30...Qg5+! 31 Kxh3

I think it is too late for White to save the game, even after the strongest 31 Kf1 Qxh5 32 Bxd6. After something like 32...Rd8 33 Bc7 Rc8 34 Bh2 (34 d6 allows 34...Nf4! with a winning attack) 34...Ng5 35 Kg2 (or 35 Re2 f4!) 35...f4! and it is impossible to defend the white king.

31...f4+! (Diagram 24)

This is what Black was playing for.

32 Re6 Qxh5+ 33 Kg2 Qg4+ 34 Kh1

White could also try 34 Kf1, but then 34...Qh3+ 35 Kg1 Bxe6 36 dxe6 f3 wins easily.

34...Bxe6 35 dxe6 Re8

Black now has a material advantage. Even after a better white defence the endgame would be impossible to hold.

36 Nde4 Rxe6 37 Qb3 0-1

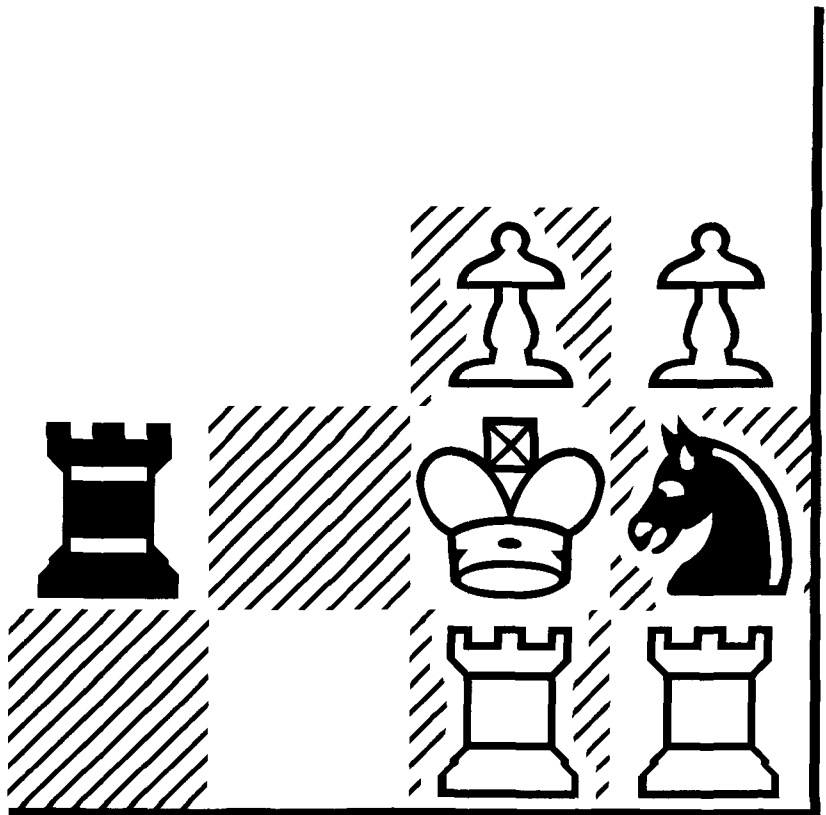
White resigned before Black could mate him in four moves starting with 37...Qf3+ 38 Kg1 Bd4+.

These few games will hopefully have given you a good impression of the most common sidelines, and made you realise that there is nothing here for Black to fear. Now let us move on to the most harmless of all the main lines.

Chapter Three

The Fianchetto Variation

- Introduction
- Black Plays 9...Nbd7
- Black Plays 9...a6



Introduction

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 (Diagram 1)

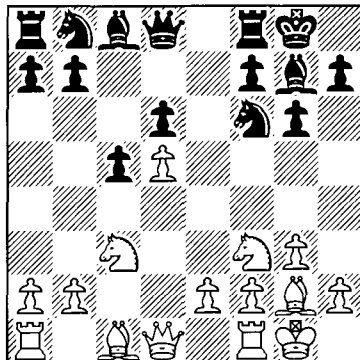


Diagram 1

The Fianchetto Variation

In this chapter we will examine the Fianchetto Variation. This is often favoured by positional players, who believe they can outplay the opponent strategically. These include such players as Korchnoi and Nikolic, who play the system from time to time with great passion. However, White's quiet beginning gives Black time to develop, while the move g2-g3 does not really support the advance e4-e5, which is Black's main concern in the Modern Benoni. Black has more than one way to gain satisfactory play, and in this chapter I will try to give a few.

Theoretical?

It truly depends on how you want to play the system. If you want to follow in the footsteps of Timman and Kasparov (see the game Korchnoi-Kasparov below) then you will have to be well prepared. If you want to play as Velimirovic and De Firmian then all you need is a few good ideas. This is one reason why I like this system so much.

Black Plays 9...Nbd7

Statistics

After 9...Nbd7 Black has a good score of 53%(!) in 292 games, so this can be seen as pretty stable. All in all this appears to be a less than harmless opening for White. Furthermore, after 10 Nd2 Nh5! Black's score goes up to 65%! His average rating is 60 points higher than White's, but the result is still encouraging. After 10 h3!, however, White is back with a score

of 59% in 29 games, which is more of a standard result, though with so few games it is only one negative result separating it from the normal 55%.

Game 18

□ Ilincic ■ Velimirovic

Yugoslav Championship, Belgrade 1998

I like the way GM Velimirovic plays against the Fianchetto Variation, even though the finish of this game is of questionable quality. He prefers a plan with ...Nh5 and ...f7-f5. GM Nick De Firmian also employs this in his games.

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 Nf3 0-0 6 g3 d6 7 Bg2 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5 Nbd7 10 Nd2 Nh5!? (Diagram 2)

This is the idea; next comes ...f7-f5.

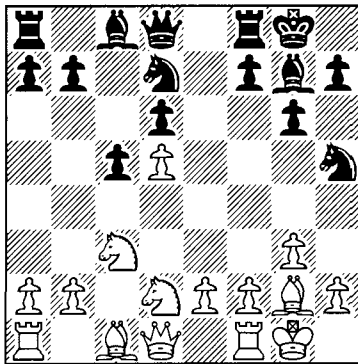


Diagram 2

Black intends ...f7-f5

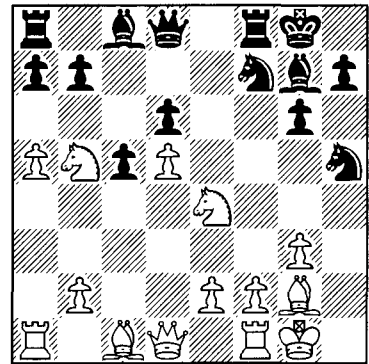


Diagram 3

Black has a nice position

11 a4

This is only one out of many possible moves here. It is difficult to give real theoretical recommendations. It is better to study some games and understand the general ideas.

a) 11 Nde4 Ndf6 12 Bg5 h6 13 Nxf6+ Nxf6 14 Bd2 Re8 15 h3 Bf5 16 Qc1 h5 17 Bh6 Qd7 with equal play in Djuric-De Firmian, New York 1986.

b) 11 Nc4 Ne5 (11...Nb6!? looks sensible as well; it is not apparent that Black should be worse) 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 Bh6 Re8 14 Qd2 Rb8 (14...Bd7!?, suggested by Akopian, seems more logical) 15 a4 a6 16 Rab1 b5 (it could be interesting to try 16...Bf5 17 e4 Bxc3 18 Qxc3 Bxe4 19 g4 Nf6 20 Rbe1 Bxg2 21 Kxg2 when Akopian gave White as winning, but after 21...Re5! this is not so clear: 22 f4 Nxd5! or 22 Rxe5 dxe5 23 Qxe5 Qxd5+ is surely OK for Black, or even better) 17 axb5 axb5 18 b4 with a slight advantage for White, according to Akopian.

We could stop the game there, but this great fight somehow deserves bet-

ter: 18...c4 19 e4 f5 20 Rbc1! Qf6 21 Bg5 Qg7 (if 21...Qf7 22 exf5 Bxf5 23 Rfe1 and White is better) 22 Rfe1 Nf6 23 Bh6 Qf7 24 exf5 Bxf5 25 h3 Bd3 (25...Re7!? Akopian) 26 Bf4! Qd7 27 Bxe5 dxe5 28 Qg5 Qd6 29 Ra1 Re7 30 Ra5! h6 (not 30...Kg7 31 Rxb5 Rxb5 32 Nxb5 Qxb4 33 Rxe5 Rxe5 34 Qxe5 Qxb5 35 Qe7+ and White wins) 31 Qxh6! Qxb4 32 Rea1! Qxc3 33 Ra8! (it suddenly seems as if Black is in trouble; 33...Kf7 34 Rxb8! Qxa1+ 35 Kh2 Ne8 36 d6! is just a sample line to show the problems Black is facing. But...) 33...Qxa1+!! (the only move) 34 Rxa1 b4! 35 Ra6! Rf7! 36 Qg5 (more testing was 36 Bf1! b3! 37 Bxd3 cxd3 38 Qxg6+ Rg7 39 Qxd3 b2 40 Qb1 Nxd5 and Black has enough compensation for his queen, one line is 41 Ra2 Rgb7 42 Qg6+ Kf8 43 Rxb2 Rxb2 44 Qf5+ Ke8! 45 Qxe5+ Ne7 with a draw to come; maybe White's best shot for a full point was 39 Qxf6, though 39...b2 40 Rb6 b1Q+ 41 Rxb1 Rxb1+ 42 Kg2 Rb2! 43 Qxe5 d2 is still probably a draw) 36...b3! 37 Rxf6 (not 37 Qxe5? Nd7! 38 Qb2 c3! 39 Qxc3 b2 and Black would win) 37...Rxf6 38 Qxf6 b2 39 Qe6+ Kh7 40 Qe7+ Kh6 41 Qh4+ ½-½ Akopian-De Firmian, Moscow 1990.

11...f5 12 a5

12 Nb5 Ne5 13 f4 should of course be met with 13...Nf7 defending d6, after which ...a6 will give Black his usual play on the queenside.

12...f4 13 Nb5

13 Nc4 Ne5 also gives Black excellent play.

13...Ne5!

13...Ndf6 14 Nc4 Ne8 was also possible, but it makes more sense to put the knight on f7.

14 Ne4 fxg3 15 hxg3 Nf7 (Diagram 3)

I like the black position here. It is difficult to see an aim for White. If he advances e2-e4 or even f2-f4, then he will surely feel the weakness of his kingside. For this reason he chose to play on the queenside.

16 Qb3 Bf5 17 Bd2 Qe7 18 Ra4 a6

18...Nf6 19 Nxf6+ Bxf6 20 e4 Bd7 is also OK for Black, but the game continuation is better.

19 Nbc3

19 Na3?! Bd4! seems very bad for White: 20 e3 Bxe4!? 21 exd4 (or 21 Bxe4 Qxe4 22 exd4 cxd4 23 Re1 Qf5) 21...Bxg2 22 Kxg2 Qe2 23 Bc1 Rae8 with a strong attacking position for Black, and a nice endgame too, should it come to that.

19...Bd4!?

Provoking White to weaken the light squares: not a guaranteed winner, but it worked well as the game turned out. 19...Rae8 was another good move.

20 e3 Bg7

Mission accomplished. Now all the other pieces can come to life.

21 Qb6!

With the idea of b2-b4. White is creating counterplay.

21...Rac8!

Preventing b2-b4, since after 22 b4?! c4 23 b5 Bxe4! (the point) 24 Nxe4 axb5 25 Qxb5 c3 it is not nice to be White.

22 Rc1 c4

Supporting the knight and cutting the a4-rook off from the kingside.

23 b3 Bxc3!?

Black shows that he is ready to run any risks in order to get the full point. 23...cxb3 24 Qxb3 Ne5 was a solid alternative.

24 Nxc3 Ne5 25 bxc4 Bd7 (Diagram 4)

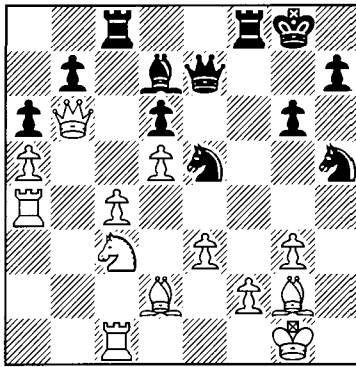


Diagram 4

Black plays for the kingside attack

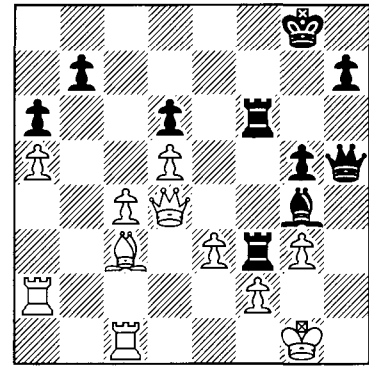


Diagram 5

Can White still defend?

Black is still going all out on the kingside. Safer was 25...Nxc4!? 26 Qd4 Nb2 27 Qh4 (if 27 Raa1 Rc4 28 Qb6 Nd3 29 Rf1 Nf6 and Black's pieces are working well together) 27...Qxh4 28 Rxh4 Nc4 29 Be1 Ne5 when Black has good play, but not necessarily any advantage.

26 Ra2

Not 26 Qxb7? Qf7! and Black wins the exchange.

26...Nf3+

26...Bg4 is too slow, since after 27 Ne4! Nf3+ 28 Bxf3 Bxf3 29 Nxd6 Black has no easy way to enter the light squares. If 29...Nxc3 (or 29...Rb8 30 Bc3 Qd7 31 Kh2 Nf6 32 e4 Qg4 33 Nf5 Qh5+ 34 Nh4 Nxe4 35 Qe6+ Rf7 36 Qe5 consolidates into a winning endgame) 30 fxg3 Qe5 31 Be1 Rf6 32 Rb1 and nothing seems to work for Black: 32...Rxd6 (or 32...Rcf8 33 Qd4! and it is all over) 33 Qxb7 Rf8 34 Rh2 Bh5 35 Qb2 Qxe3+ 36 Bf2 and it still seems that White will end on top.

27 Bxf3

27 Kf1 Nxc3+! is easy, but it is slightly harder to see that 27 Kh1 Bg4! gives Black a winning attack. The white king is simply trapped in the corner and Black will follow with 28...Nxc3+ 29 fxg3 Qe5 etc.

27...Rxf3 28 Ne2 Rcf8 29 Be1!

29 Nf4? would allow Black to blow the kingside away with again
29...Nxc3! 30 fxc3 (if 30 Be1, simply 30...Nh5!) 30...Rxc3+ 31 Kf2 Qh4 32
Ke2 Rxf4! 33 exf4 Bg4+ with mate to follow.

29...Qf7

29...g5!? also looks strong.

30 Nf4 g5 31 Nxc3 Qxc3 32 Bc3!

White needs to seek immediate counterplay.

32...Bg4?

Too slow. Now White has the chance of his life (or at least this game).
32...Bh3! was better, when the black attack is very dangerous: 33 e4! (the
only move; if 33 Qd4? R8f6! 34 Qe4 Bg4!! 35 Qe7 Rg6! 36 Rb2 Rf7 wins, or
35 Bxf6 Rxf6 36 f4 Bf3 37 Qb1 gxf4 38 exf4 Qh1+ 39 Kf2 Qg2+ 40 Ke3
Qxc3 41 Kd2 Rxf4 and Black's attack should be winning) 33...R3f6!?
(33...Qg4 34 Kh2 Qh5 is an immediate draw by repetition) 34 f4! (again
the only move; if 34 Qe3 Rh6 35 Qd4 Rff6 36 f4 Bg4 and the attack is too
strong) 34...Qg4 35 Bxf6 Qxc3+ 36 Kh1 Bg4 37 Rc3 Bf3+ 38 Rxf3 Qxf3+
39 Rg2 Rxf6!? (39...Qh5+ draws again) 40 Qd8+ Kf7 41 Qd7+ Kg8 42
Qd8+ and here White forces the draw.

33 Qd4?

A horrible move. 33 Qxd6! was much stronger, when it seems that White
wins after 33...Rxf2 (if 33...R3f6 34 Bxf6 Bf3 35 Qe6+! Rf7 36 Qe8+ wins,
while 33...R3f7 34 Qe5 Rf6 35 f4! does not inspire confidence either) 34
Rxf2 Rxf2 35 Qb8+ Rf8 36 Qe5 and the black king is certainly weaker.

33...R8f6 (Diagram 5) 34 e4?

Not a very strong defence. The white position is no longer very reliable,
but there was no reason to completely lose the plot. Better was 34 Re1
(not 34 Qxf6? Rxf6 35 Bxf6 Bf3 and White is mated) 34...Qh3! (34...R3f5?
35 f4! Bf3 36 Rh2 Qg4 37 Kf2 wins for White, and 34...R3f4? 35 exf4 Bf3
does not work due to 36 Re8+ Kf7 37 Qxf6+ Kxe8 38 Qe6+ and mates) 35
e4 R3f4! 36 Re3 Bf3 37 Rxf3 Rxf3 38 Qxf6! Rxf6 39 Bxf6 Qg4 and Black
has very good chances at winning the endgame, but White can still fight.

34...Qh3

Simpler was 34...Rxc3! 35 Rxc3 (if 35 Qxc3 Bf3 wins) 35...Rh6 36 f3 Qh1+
37 Kf2 Rh2+ 38 Ke3 Qxf3 mate.

35 Rd2

If 35 Rb1 R3f4! 36 Qb6 (or 36 Rxb7 Bf3 and mates) 36...Rh6 (but not
36...Bf3?? 37 Qd8+ Rf8 38 Qxc5+ and White wins) 37 Qd8+ Rf8 38 Qxc5+
Rg6 39 Qxc6+ (or 39 Qh4 Qxh4 40 gxf4 Be2+ 41 Kh1 Rf3 42 Kh2 Rxf2+
43 Kh3 Bg4+) 39...hxc6 40 Rxb7 Rc8! (not 40...Bf3? 41 Rg7+ Kh8 42 Rf7+
with a draw) 41 Rg7+ Kf8 42 Rxc6 Rc7! 43 Rb2 Rh7 and Black wins.

35...R3f4!?

Complicating matters. Simpler was 35...Rxc3! 36 Qxc3 (36 Rxc3 Rh6
leads quickly to mate again) 36...Bf3 and White must give up his queen.

36 f3 Rxf3 37 Rg2 Kf7!?

Black simply moves the king away from the mate on g7 and suddenly ...Rh6 is a killer. 37...Rxc3 38 Rcc2 Bf3 was another way to end the game.

38 Ba1

Or 38 Rb1 Bc8! and the threat of ...Rh6 is devastating.

38...Rh6 39 Qg7+ Ke8 0-1

White must surrender the queen to avoid immediate mate.

The following game gives a good impression of how harmless the white system with g2-g3 really is. White jumps up like a tiger, but falls down like a pussycat. Black is clearly ready for the fight and we see something very uncommon in chess: a position in which a rook is enough compensation for the queen, as the white king is in danger and Black has strong passed pawns on the queenside.

Game 19

□ **Ligterink** ■ **Nunn**

Marbella zonal 1982

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 Nbd7

An important trick to be familiar with is 9...Na6 10 Nd2 Nc7 11 Nc4!, when Black cannot play 11...b5? because of 12 Nxd6! (**Diagram 6**)

12...Qxd6 13 Bf4 Qb6 14 d6 Rd8 15 dxc7 Rxd1 16 Rfxd1 Bb7 17 Bxb7 Qxb7 18 Rd8+ Ne8 19 Nxb5! and White wins.

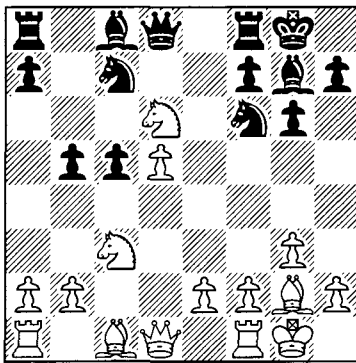


Diagram 6
A trick to remember

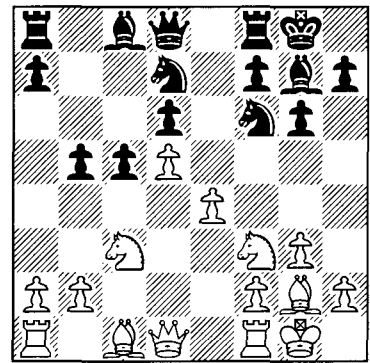


Diagram 7
Black plays 10...b5!

10 e4!?

10 h3 is probably a good option for White, e.g. 10...a6 11 Bf4 Qe7 12 e4 Nh5 (pay attention to this move as a way of protecting the e5-square) 13 Bg5 Bf6 (13...Nh6!?) 14 Bh6 Ng7!? (14...Re8 would be more normal here) 15 Re1 b5 16 Kh2 b4 17 Na4 Rb8 18 Qc2 (18 Rc1! with advantage for White was stronger – Sax) 18...Ne5 19 Nd2 (19 Nxe5 Bxe5 20 f4 Bd4 21

e5 Bd7 22 e6 Bxa4 23 Qxa4 Bxb2 would benefit Black) 19...Bd7 20 Bf1 c4! 21 f4 Bxa4 (here 21...Nd3!? was interesting, e.g. 22 Bxd3 cxd3 23 Qd1 Bxa4 24 Qxa4 Bxb2 25 Rad1 Qa7 26 Kg2 Bc3 and White would be in real trouble, and 22 Nxc4 Nxe1 23 Rxe1 Rfc8 does not work either – Sax) 22 Qxa4 c3 23 bxc3 bxc3 24 Nb3 (24 fxe5 cxd2 25 exf6 dxe1 Q 26 fxe7 Qxa1 27 exf8 Q+ Rxf8 would also give Black good play) 24...Nf3+ (now Black is on top) 25 Kg2 Nxe1+ 26 Rxe1 Rfe8 27 h4 Nf5 28 Bg5 Bxg5 29 hxg5 Qa7 30 Qa5 Ne3+ 31 Kf3 Nc2 32 Qxc3 Rbc8 33 Qd2 Nxe1+ 34 Qxe1 Qg1 35 Nd2 Rc3+ 36 Kg4 Qh1 37 f5 Qh5+ 38 Kf4 h6 0-1 Vaganian-Sax, Rotterdam 1989.

10...a6

When given the chance Black should not refrain from seizing space on the queenside immediately with 10...b5! (**Diagram 7**). Now White has several possibilities:

- a) 11 Nxb5 Nxe4 12 Re1 a6! is the point behind Black's play. Then 13 Rxe4 axb5 14 Bg5 Nf6 15 Re2 Re8 is better for Black, while 13 Na3 Re8 looks fine for Black too.
- b) 11 Re1 b4 12 Nb1 Re8 13 Qc2 Ba6 gave Black good play after 14 Bf4? (14 Nbd2 c4! is also better for Black) 14...Nxe4! 15 Nbd2 (if 15 Rxe4 Rxe4 16 Qxe4 Bxb2 wins) 15...Nxd2 16 Nxd2 Ne5 17 Bf1 Bxf1 18 Kxf1 Qd7 19 Bxe5 Bxe5 20 Nc4 Bd4 21 Re2 Rxe2 22 Qxe2 Re8 23 Qf3 a5 24 Rd1 a4 25 Kg2 h5 26 h3 Qe7 27 Qf4 Bxf2 0-1 Govciyan-Efimov, Monaco 2000.
- c) 11 e5 dxe5 12 Nxb5 Ba6 13 a4 Qb6 14 Re1 Rfe8 15 Bf1 Rad8 16 Qb3 e4 17 Nd2 Qb8 18 d6 Ne5 19 Nxe4 Nxe4 20 Rxe4 Bb7 with unclear play in Schulte-Sax, Lugano 1985. Now anything could have happened – and something did: 21 Re3 Rf8 22 Rc3?! (this looks weird; 22 Bd2 was better) 22...Ba8 23 Bg5 Qb7 24 f3 Rb8!? (24...Nxf3+ 25 Rxf3 Qxf3 26 Qxf3 Bxf3 27 Bxd8 Rxd8 28 Kf2 Bb7 was certainly not bad either) 25 Be7 Rfe8 26 Bg2 c4 27 Qc2 Nd3 28 Rxc4 Qb6+ 29 Kh1? (29 Kf1 was correct) 29...Nf2+ 30 Kg1 Ng4+ 31 Rc5 Ne3 32 a5 (if 32 Qc1 Nxe2 33 Kxe2 Bxb2 34 a5!? Qb7! 35 Qxb2 Qxf3+ 36 Kh3 Bc6 with a clear advantage to Black) 32...Qb7?? (32...Qxb5! wins immediately) 33 Qe2 Nxe2 34 Kxe2 Bf8 35 Rc7? (35 Nc7! Qxb2 36 Ra2 and Black can resign) 35...Qa6 36 Rac1?? (36 Nd4 Qxe2+ 37 Nxe2 still gave White winning chances) 36...Rxb5 (now White is in trouble) 37 R1c5? Qxd6! (and now it is over) 38 Qxb5 Rxe7? (38...Qd2+! wins quickly, e.g. 39 Kh3 Bxf3 40 Bxf8 Qg2+ 41 Kh4 Qxh2+ 42 Kg5 Qh5+ 43 Kf6 Re6 mate) 39 Rxe7 Qxe7 40 Rc8 a6 41 Qc4 Bb7 42 Rc7 Bd5 43 Rxe7 Bxc4 44 Re4 Bb5 (fortunately the endgame still wins for Black). 45 g4 Bg7 46 b4 h6 47 h3 Bc3 48 h4 Kg7 49 g5 hxg5 50 hxg5 Bd2 51 Rg4 Be3 52 Kh2 Kf8 53 Rg2 Ke7 0-1.

11 Bf4 Qe7

11...Qc7?! is wrong because of 12 e5! dxe5 13 d6 Qb6 14 Nxe5 Qxb2 15 Rc1 Nxe5 16 Bxe5 and even though Black has won a pawn, his position is not too encouraging. The d-pawn is very strong and the white pieces are very active.

12 Re1 Ng4 13 Bg5

If 13 a4 Nde5 with equality.

13...Qe8

‘Very provocative,’ writes Nunn. 13...Bf6 was bad because of 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 h3 Nge5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 f4 Nc4 18 e5! dxe5 19 b3 Nb6 20 fxe5 and the black position is unplayable.



TIP: Generally I would not recommend exchanging the g7-bishop as this is Black’s best piece. There will be positions where it is necessary in order to avoid a greater evil. In this position, however, both Black’s alternatives are superior.

However, 13...f6!? was possible, e.g. 14 Bc1 b5 15 h3 Nge5 16 Nxe5 fxe5 and Black has no problems (Nunn).

14 e5!?

Very sharp play. However, there is nothing wrong with Black’s position and he can therefore escape from the tactics without any problems.

14...Ndxе5

14...dxe5?! 15 d6 is good for White.

15 Nxe5 Nxe5

Again not 15...dxe5?! 16 d6!.

16 f4 Ng4!! (Diagram 8)

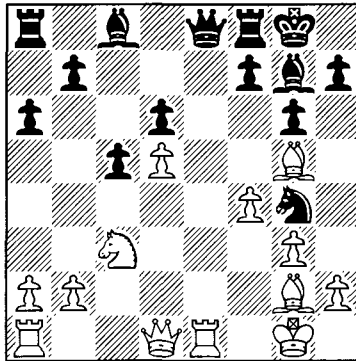


Diagram 8
A brilliant queen sacrifice

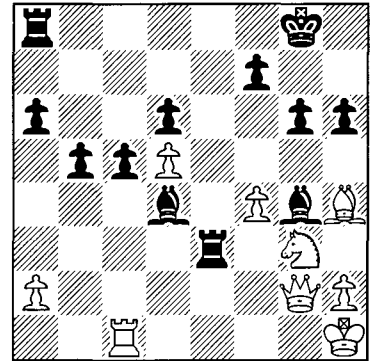


Diagram 9
The black pieces are closing in

But 16...Bg4? 17 Qc1! h6 18 fxe5 hxg5 19 Qxg5 would not be good for Black, while after 16...h6 17 Bh4 g5 18 fxe5 gxh4 19 e6! and ‘the e-pawn remains a terrible thorn in Black’s side’, e.g. 19...Be5 20 Qg4+ Kh8 21 Qxh4 (Nunn).

17 Rxe8 Rxe8 18 Ne2?!

After this Black is allowed to play for a win. Most other moves lead to a draw:

a) 18 Qf1 Bd4+ 19 Kh1 Nf2+ 20 Kg1 Ng4+ with perpetual check.

b) 18 Qd2 Bd4+ is perpetual again.

c) 18 Ne4!? gives Black two ways to force a draw: 18...Bd4+ 19 Qxd4 cxd4 20 Nxd6 Re2 21 Nxc8 Rxc8 22 Kxc8 Rxc8 23 Kf3 Nxc8 24 Ke4 f5+ 'leading to a near-certain draw' – Nunn, or 18...Rxe4 19 Bxe4 Bd4+ 20 Qxd4 cxd4 21 Be7 Bf5 22 Bxf5 gxf5 23 Rd1 Re8 24 Bxd6 Rd8 with a draw to come.

d) 18 Qb3?, however, loses by force: 18...Bd4+ 19 Kh1 (19 Kf1? Nxc2 mate) 19...Nf2+ 20 Kg1 Nd1+! 21 Kf1 (21 Kh1? Re1+ mates) 21...Ne3+ 22 Kg1 (or 22 Ke1 c4! 23 Qa4 b5 24 Qa5 Nxc2+ 25 Kd2 Be3+ 26 Kc2 Bf5+ 27 Kd1 b4 and the attack is simple too strong: 28 Qxb4 Bc5 29 Qa5 Re1+ 30 Kd2 Be3 mate) 22...Nc2+ 23 Kh1 Nxa1 24 Qd1 Bxc3! (simplest) 25 bxc3 Nc2! 26 Qxc2 Re1+ 27 Bf1 Bh3 and wins.

18...Ne3 19 Qd2 Nc4 20 Qc2 b5!

Black declines the offer of a draw by repetition after 20...Ne3.

21 g4

a) 21 Be4 does not work after 21...Bg4! (threatening 22...Bxe2 23 Qxe2 f5) 22 Re1 f5 23 Bg2 Bd4+ 24 Nxd4 Rxe1+ 25 Kf2 Rd1 26 Nf3 Bxf3 27 Kxf3 Rd2 28 Qc3 Re8 29 Bf1 Re3+ 30 Qxe3 Nxe3 31 Kxe3 Rxb2 32 Be7 Rxa2 33 Bxd6 c4 with advantage to Black is analysis by Nunn. The point is that the black king will be able to defend against the d-pawn on the light squares, as the f1-bishop is completely out of play.

b) 21 Nc3!? Bf5 22 Be4 b4 23 Bxf5 bxc3 24 bxc3 Ne3 25 Qd2 Nxf5 'is one of White's better lines, but even here I would prefer to be Black' – Nunn.

21...Bxg4

Here I would have considered 21...Bxb2!? 22 Rf1 Bxg4 23 Rf2 Bf5 24 Qd1 Ne3 25 Qd2 Bg7 with very active play for the queen.

22 Ng3?!

22 Nc3 looked more sensible, but Black still has good play after 22...Bf5.

22...h6

22...Bxb2 23 Rc1 Re3!? is a typical computer move, when 24 f5 Bxc1 25 Qxc1 Rd3 26 Qc2 Rd1+ 27 Kf2 is a mess.

23 Bh4 Bxb2 24 Rc1 Bd4+

24...Re3 is now too ambitious, since White has 25 h3! Bxc1 (or 25...Bd7 26 Nf1) 26 hxg4 Qxc1 (if 26 hxg4 Re1+ 27 Nf1 Be3+ 28 Kh1 Ra1) 26...Bf3 27 Nf1 Rd3 28 f5! Kh7 (or 28...g5 29 Bxg5 Kh7 30 Qb1) 29 fxg6+ fxg6 30 Qf4 Ne5 31 Be7! and the white play is suddenly looking dangerous.

25 Kh1 Ne3! 26 Qd2 Nxc2

26...Nf5!? 27 Nxf5 Bxf5 28 Bf2 Bg7 was also interesting.

27 Qxg2

Possibly 27 Kxc2 was better, since 27...Be3 28 Qb2 Bxf4 (or if 28...g5 29 fxg5 hxg5 30 Qf6! gxh4 31 Rf1) 29 Bf6! is not as bad as it might at first appear.

27...Re3 (Diagram 9) 28 Rf1?

White's last resource was 28 Nf1! Bf3 29 Nxe3 Bxg2+ 30 Nxc2 c4 with a slightly better ending for Black.

28...Rae8 29 f5?!

29 h3 Bc8 30 f5 g5 31 Nh5 was the best chance, but Nunn came up with a strong response in 31...Re2 32 Qg4 R2e4!, analysing 33 Nf4 R8e5 34 Bxg5 Bxf5 35 Qh4 hxg5 36 Qxg5+ Bg6 37 Qd8+ Re8 38 Qxd6 Re1 39 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 40 Kg2 Be4+ 41 Kg3 Rg1+ 42 Kh2 Bf2 43 Qd8+ Kh7 and mate follows unless White gives up his queen. Clearly this analysis has been made possible by a computer program.

29...g5 30 f6

30 Bxg5 hxg5 31 h3 Be5! is hopeless for White, and 30 h3 gxh4 does not help either.

30...Kh8! 31 Bxg5

If 31 Nf5 Bh3 wins.

31...hxg5 32 Nf5 Bxf5 33 Rxf5 Re1+ 34 Rf1 Bxf6 35 Qh3+ Kg7 36 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 37 Kg2 c4 0-1

Black Plays 9...a6

The next game is one of the most famous ever played in the Modern Benoni. Kasparov was likely to play Korchnoi in the coming candidates tournament and wanted to put pressure on his prospective opponent. Even though he did not progress from the opening without problems, Kasparov got a position that suited him better, and was able to defeat his opponent with superior tactics (though that does not say a lot in this game).

Statistics

For 9...a6 the score is 50-50 in 1000 games, according to *ChessBase* statistics calculation. However, it is really 50.6% for Black, as he has won six games more than he has lost. This goes fine with my gut feeling that Black has a good position and should be no worse in these lines. After 10 a4 Re8, Black goes up a little to 53% in 444 games.

Game 20

□ Korchnoi ■ Kasparov

Lucerne Olympiad 1982

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 c5 5 d5 d6 6 Nc3 0-0 7 Nf3 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5 a6

This is probably the best move order.

10 a4 Re8

10...Nbd7 has been played as well, and with good results. For example: a) 11 h3 Re8 12 Bf4 Nh5 13 Bg5 (13 Bxd6?! Qb6 would favour Black) 13...Qb6 14 Qc2 Ne5 15 Kh2 h6 16 a5 Qc7 17 Bd2 Bd7 18 Na4 Bb5 and Black is fine. Sherbakov-Velimirovic, Belgrade 2000.

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

b) 11 Nd2 Rb8 12 Nc4 Nb6 13 Na3 Bd7 14 e4 Nc8 15 Qd3 Ng4 16 h3 Ne5 17 Qe2 f5 18 f4 Nf7 19 exf5 gxf5 20 Kh2 Re8 21 Qd3 Qf6 22 Rd1 with unclear play in L.Johannessen-Beliavsky, Copenhagen 2003.

c) 11 Bf4 Qc7 12 Rc1 (or 12 e4 Ng4 13 Nd2 Nge5 14 Qc2 Rb8 15 a5 b5 16 axb6 Nxb6 with even chances in Pr.Nikolic-De Firmian, Selfoss 2003) 12...Nh5 13 Bg5 Re8 14 Qd2 Nhf6 15 Bh6 Bh8 16 h3 Ne4! 17 Nxe4 Rxe4 18 b4 Qd8 19 Rb1 a5! 20 bxa5 Rxa5 21 Bf4 Ra6 (21...Rexa4!?) 22 a5 Nf6 23 Rb5 Qe8 24 Rb6 Rxe2 25 Qd1 Rxa5 26 Bxd6 Raa2 27 Bxc5 Ne4 28 Bd4 Bxd4 29 Qxd4 Nxc3 30 Qh4 Nf5 31 Qf6 Rxf2 32 Rxf2 Rxf2 33 Qe5 Re2 34 Qxe8+ Rxe8 35 Ng5 Rd8 36 Ne4 Kf8 37 d6 Be6 38 Ng5 Rxd6 39 Rxb7 Kg7 40 Be4 Nd4 41 h4 h6 0-1 Drasko-Velimirovic, Subotica 2000. Truly great play from Velimirovic.

11 Nd2 Nbd7 12 h3 Rb8 13 Nc4 Ne5 14 Na3 Nh5 15 e4 Rf8 16 Kh2 f5!?

Here Kasparov recommended 16...Bd7 17 f4 b5 as a better course of action. Then 18 fxe5 Nxc3 19 Kxc3 Bxe5+ 20 Kf3 b4 21 Nc4 bxc3 22 bxc3 Bxc3 23 Ra3 Rb4 was unclear in Ross-O'Donnell, British Columbia 1986. Whether or not this line is to be trusted for Black is hard to say.

17 f4 b5! (Diagram 10)

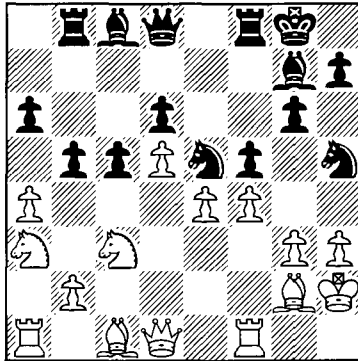


Diagram 10

The Benoni is not a passive defence!

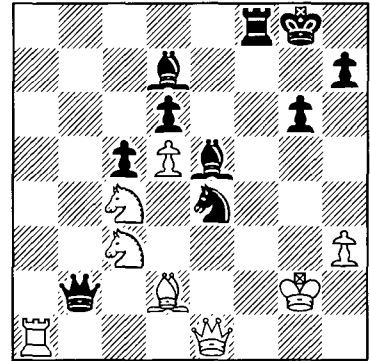


Diagram 11

What is Black's simplest win?



TIP: Remember that it is important in the Modern Benoni to play as aggressively as possible. Here Kasparov ignores the threat to his knight in order to create counter-chances. This is the right attitude for the Modern Benoni player.

18 axb5

If 18 fxe5 Nxc3!? (18...b4 19 Nc4! bxc3 20 bxc3 is good for White) 19 Kxc3 Bxe5+ 20 Kf2 Qh4+ 21 Kg1 Qg3!? (21...b4 looks more reliable) 22 Rf3 Qh2+ 23 Kf1? Bd7! 24 Nc4? (24 Bh6! fxe4 25 Rxf8+ Rxf8 26 Bxf8 Bxh3 or 26...Bd4 leads to a draw) 24...bxc4 25 Ra3 fxe4 26 Nxe4 Bxh3! and Black won in Birnboim-Arnason, Randers 1982. However, White can improve

with 23 Kf2 Bd7 (23...Bd4+ 24 Qxd4! cxd4 25 Bf4 fxe4 26 Bxh2 exf3 27 Bf1 would favour White) 24 Qg1 Bd4+ 25 Be3 Qe5 'with compensation' (Arnason), though whether or not this is enough I find hard to judge. I fear it is not.

18...axb5 19 Naxb5

Again if 19 fxe5 Nxc3! 20 Rf3 Bxe5 21 Naxb5 Qh4 22 exf5 Bxf5 23 Ra4 Be4!! (23...c4!? was also strong) 24 Rxf8+? (maybe White could still survive with 24 Nxe4 Nxe4+ 25 Kg1 Rxf3 26 Qxf3 Qe1+ 27 Qf1 Qg3 28 Rxe4 Qh2+ 29 Kf2 Rf8+ 30 Ke2 Rxf1 31 Kxf1 and the position is rather unclear) 24...Rxf8 25 Kg1 Ne2+! 26 Qxe2 Qg3 27 Bf4 Qxf4 28 Bxe4 Qg3+ 29 Kh1 Rf1+ 0-1 Van Wely-Timman, Wijk aan Zee 2002.

19...fxe4 20 Bxe4!

A new move at the time. 20 Na7 e3! had been played before (Alburt-H.Olafsson, Reykjavik 1982). Kasparov also analysed 20 Nxd6 Qxd6 21 Nxe4 Qb6 22 fxe5 Rxf1 23 Qxf1 Bxe5 with compensation for the pawn. Instead 20...Nxc3!? 21 Kxc3 Qxd6 22 Nxe4 Qb6 is unclear according to Kasparov. My computer disagrees, saying that 23 fxe5!? Bxe5+ 24 Kh4! is winning, though I am not sure I would feel safe playing like this with White. 23 d6!? looks good for White, however.

20...Bd7

The best move according to Kasparov, but I reckon that Timman was planning to play 20...Nc4!? with the unorthodox idea of 21 Qe2 Na5! 22 Re1 Nb3 23 Ra7 Nxc1 24 Rxc1 Nxf4! 25 gxf4 Qh4 when Black has brilliant compensation for the sacrificed piece. Actually my computer thinks the position is -0.09.

21 Qe2!

If 21 Nxd6?! Rb6!! 22 fxe5 Bxe5 23 Nc4 Bxc3+ 24 Kg1 (not 24 Kg2? Bxc3+! and wins) 24...Bxc3! with a strong attack (Kasparov).

21...Qb6 22 Na3! Rbe8 23 Bd2?

23 Qg2! was much stronger, after which White would have the better chances. Now Black takes control.

23...Qxb2! 24 fxe5?

This knight was harmless, whereas the bishop will be very dangerous. 24 Rfb1? Nf3+!! was probably what Korchnoi had overlooked. Better was 24 Ra2! Qb4! 25 Rb1 Qd4 though Black still has a strong initiative.

24...Bxe5 25 Nc4 Nxc3 26 Rxf8+ Rxf8 27 Qe1 Nxe4+ 28 Kg2 (Diagram 11) 28...Qc2?!

28...Rf2+ 29 Qxf2 Bxc3+! 30 Kf3 (or 30 Kg1 Qxa1+) 30...Bg4+ 31 Kxe4 Qc2+ 32 Ke3 Bd4+ would have won very simply.



TIP: When you are winning it is very important to concentrate. When you have your opponent on the floor you should use the time necessary to finish him off correctly, and not let the trend of the game change so that he gets into the game again. Here Kasparov did that and it might have cost him, had Korchnoi not blundered in the end.

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

29 Nxe5 Rf2+?!

Here 29...Nxd2 30 Nxd7 Nf3+ 31 Qe2 Nh4+! won, as did 29...Bxh3+! 30 Kxh3 Nxd2 and the white king is wide open.

30 Qxf2!

Not 30 Kg1? Rxd2 31 Qxe4 Qxc3 32 Ra8+ Kg7 and Black wins.

30...Nxf2! 31 Ra2! Qf5!

If 31...Bxh3+!? 32 Kg3! (not 32 Kxf2 Qf5+ 33 Nf3 Bg4 and Black wins) 32...Nh1+ 33 Kh2 Qb3 34 Ra8+ Kg7 35 Ra7+ Kf6 36 Nf3 and White is still fighting.

32 Nxd7 Nd3 33 Bh6! Qxd7 34 Ra8+ Kf7 35 Rh8?

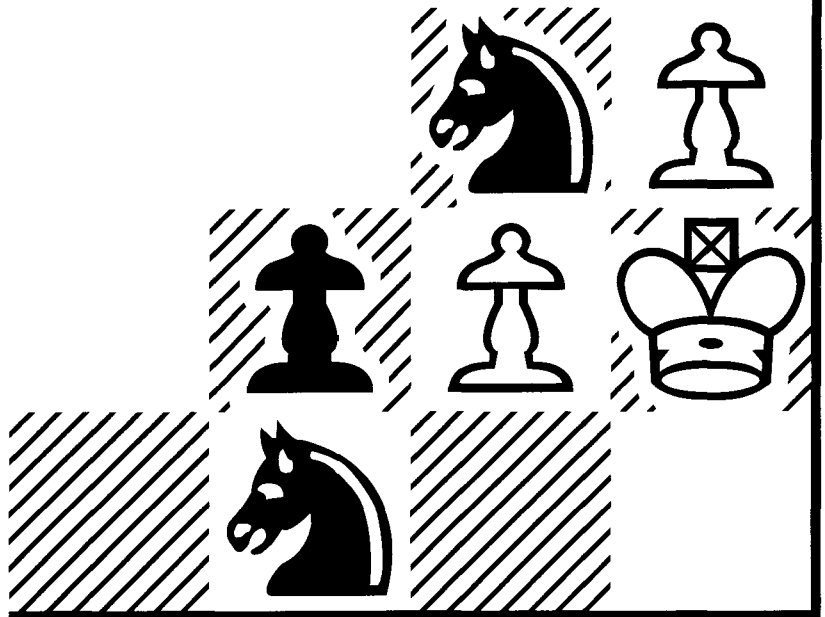
Making it easy again for Black. Better was 35 Ne4! when 35...g5!! was Kasparov's intended winning move. However, 36 Bxg5!? h6! 37 Bxh6 Kg6 is not that simple after 38 Ra6! Qb7 39 Rxd6+ Kf5 40 Nd2 and a clear win eludes me.

35...Kf6! 36 Kf3?! Qxh3+ 0-1

Chapter Four

Systems with f2-f3

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ White Plays Bg5
- ▨ White Plays Be3
- ▨ White Delays Development of the Bishop
- ▨ White Plays 7 Bd3 and 8 Nge2



Introduction

In this chapter we shall look at lines that can arise as true Benonis (after 2...c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3 etc.), but more usually from the Sämisch variation of the King's Indian (2...g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 and 6...c5). These lines are perhaps not the most important when you play the 2...c5 or 2...e6 move order, but they still contain an significant part of the Modern Benoni in modern tournament practice, so it is important to me that they are represented here. In the final game of this chapter we look at the related system Bd3 and Nge2, in which White tries to do without f2-f3.

To be honest, f2-f3 and Bg5 / Be3 / Nge2 is a headache. I suggest you take some medicine while dealing with it. White will not necessarily have the problems with the knight on e2 as he has in some of the coming games, but still there is no easier way to develop his pieces.

White Plays Bg5

The first game is for the White players. I like it because I have played this system with White against the King's Indian many times transposing to the Benoni Defence. The most common move order is seen here, but 2...c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3 Bg7 8 Bg5 etc. is also possible.

Statistics

After 9...h6 White scores 56% in 175 games, which shows that this is a normal line and nothing more nor less.

Game 21

□ **Rajkovic** ■ **Kofidis**

Komotini 1993

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 Bg5 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Qd2 exd5 9 cxd5 h6 (Diagram 1)

10 Be3

10 Bxh6 Nxe4 is a discussion of its own: 11 Nxe4 Qh4+ 12 g3 Qxh6 13 Qxh6 Bxh6 14 Nxd6 Nd7 15 f4 Nf6 16 0-0-0 Rd8 17 Nxc8 Raxc8 18 Bg2! (the only try for an advantage; 18 Nf3 Nxd5 19 Ne5 Nxf4! 18 Ne2 Nxd5 19 Nc3 Nxc3 is equal) 18...Ng4 (18...b5!? with compensation is a good suggestion from Piket) 19 Bh3 Nf2 20 Bxc8 Nxd1 21 Kxd1 Rxc8 22 Ne2 Rd8 23 Nc3 Bg7 24 Kc2 Bxc3 25 bxc3 Rxd5 26 a4! with a slightly better rook endgame in Piket-Van Wely, Amsterdam 1996, though Black drew.

10...Re8

Black can have good counterplay on the queenside if he grabs it: 10...a6 11 a4 Re8 12 Nge2 Nbd7 13 Nd1 Ne5 14 Nec3 Bd7 15 Be2 Kh7 16 0-0 Rb8! 17 a5 b5 18 axb6 Rxb6 19 Nf2 a5 20 Ra2 Rb4 21 Rfa1 Qb6 22 Rxa5

Rxb2 23 Qc1 Rb8 24 Bd2 Qb3 25 R5a3 Qc2 26 Qxc2 Rxc2 27 R3a2 ½-½
Lautier-Kasparov, Horgen 1995.

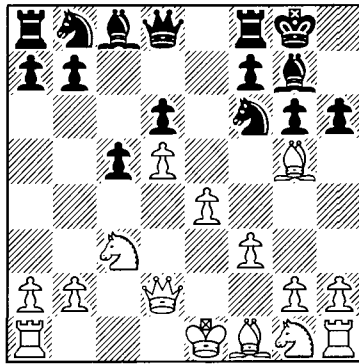


Diagram 1

Can't White just take the h-pawn?

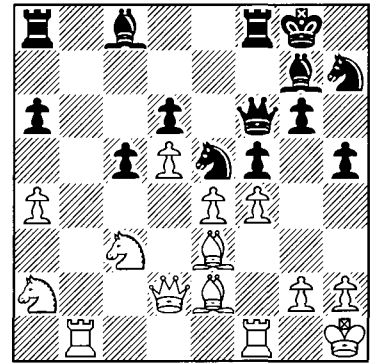


Diagram 2

The black army is thrown into confusion

11 Nge2 Nbd7 12 Nc1 a6 13 a4 Nh7 14 Be2 Ne5 15 0-0 h5 16 Rb1!?

In this position b2-b4 is a good plan.

16...f5 17 b4 b6

Or 17...c4!? 18 b5! with better play for White.

18 N1a2 Qf6

18...g5!?, with the idea 19 f4 Ng4! 20 Bxg4 hxg4, was a good way for Black to put some energy into his position. Another try was 18...Nf6 19 bxc5 bxc5 and I see nothing wrong with the black position.

19 bxc5 bxc5 20 Kh1 Rf8 21 f4! (Diagram 2)

Suddenly the black pieces are not very well placed.

21...Ng4 22 Bxg4 hxg4 23 e5!

This spells disaster for Black.

23...dxe5 24 Bxc5 exf4 25 Rb6!

Winning the exchange is not that important. Instead White removes his opponent's counterplay.

25...Qd8

25...Qh4!? was last try.

26 Rxg6 Rf6 27 Rxg7+! Kxg7 28 Bd4 Bb7 29 Qxf4 Bxd5 30 Bxf6+ Nxf6 31 Qg5+ Kf7 32 Qxf5 Bb7 33 Qh7+ 1-0

A great game for White, but not really for Black.

White Plays Be3

In the next game we see a great performance by Judit Polgar in one of the most complicated lines of the Modern Benoni.

Statistics

After 6 Be3 c5 7 Nge2 Nc6 8 d5 Ne5 9 Ng3 e6 10 Be2 exd5 11 cxd5 (by the usual King's Indian move order) White has an excellent score of 60% in 254 games, but once again we see that it is not that bad for Black when we look at the top 20. Then White has only a very slight plus of 53% vs. 47%, and for some reason a lot of the games were drawn.

Game 22

□ Gulko ■ J.Polgar

Yerevan Olympiad 1996

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 Be3 c5 7 Nge2

7 d5 leads to another version of the same kind of lines. White's idea is to play Nh3-f2, something Black should never allow. But as White will have to develop his knight from g1 before Black will have to play ...Nbd7, this should not be a big problem.

7...Nc6 8 d5

8 Qd2 is a true Sämisch King's Indian and beyond the scope of this book.

8...Ne5 9 Ng3 e6 10 Be2 exd5 11 cxd5 (Diagram 3)

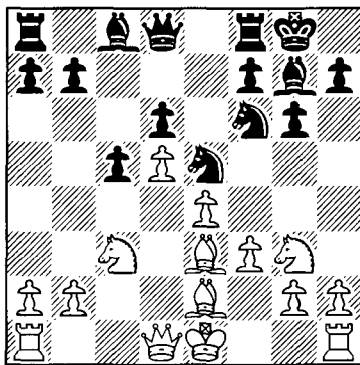


Diagram 3

A standard Sämisch Benoni position

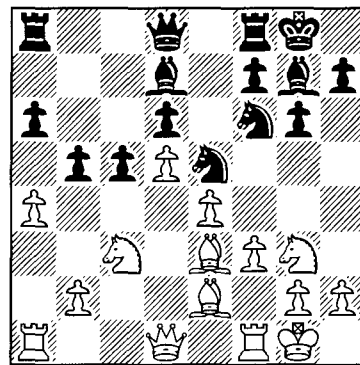


Diagram 4

Another sharp pawn sacrifice

This is a standard position in this line which once again comes from the King's Indian Defence. The Modern Benoni route would be 2...c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3 Bg7 8 Be3 0-0 9 Nge2 Nbd7 10 Ng3 Ne5 11 Be2, though Black does not have to play a quick ...Nbd7-e5 here of course.

11...a6 12 a4 h5

Chasing the white knight by ...h5-h4 is very popular, mainly because it gives the option of ...h4-h3 later. However, it also allows White to relocate his knight by Ng3-h1-f2 without losing time, so it is a complicated choice.

Another option is the pawn sacrifice 12...Bd7 13 0-0 b5!? (**Diagram 4**) which is very sharp, but probably OK:

a) 14 axb5 axb5 15 Bxb5 (or 15 Rxa8 Qxa8 16 Bxb5 Bxb5 17 Nxb5 Qa6 followed by ...Rb8 with full compensation) 15...Bxb5 16 Nxb5 Qb6 and Black regains the pawn: 17 Qe2 Rab8 18 Na7 Qxb2 19 Qxb2 Rxb2 20 Rfb1 Rc2 21 Ra6 (21 Nb5 Nc4 22 Bf4 Nh5! 23 Nxb5 Bxa1 24 Rxa1 gxh5 would favour Black) 21...Nc4 22 Bf4 Ra8 23 h4 Nd7 24 Kh2 h5 25 Kh3 Nde5 26 Rb7?? Nd3! won a piece in Seirawan-Ivanchuk, Roquebrune (blitz) 1992.

b) 14 h3 Rb8! 15 b3 (or 15 axb5 Bxb5! 16 Nxb5 axb5 17 b3 Ned7 18 Ra6 with unclear play in B.Lalic-Timoshchenko, Piestany 1996; there was no reason for the players to agree a draw just yet) 15...Ne8! (this is good in most lines here) 16 Rc1 bxa4! (the standard reaction) 17 bxa4 (17 f4 axb3 18 fxe5 Bxe5 gives Black far more than enough for the piece) 17...Rb4!? 18 Bxa6 Qa5 19 Bb5 Bxb5 20 axb5 Nc7 21 Kh1 Nxb5 22 Nxb5 Qxb5 and Black was better in Reilly-Nunn, Islington 1990.

13 0-0 Nh7

Preventing Be3-g5 and making ready to play ...f5. This is possible now the h5-pawn defends the g4-square, so f2-f4 does not cause any trouble.

14 Qd2 h4 15 Nh1 f5 16 Nf2 Re8

16...Bd7!? is another possibility.

17 Kh1 Rb8 18 Rg1 Rf8!?

A new move at the time, though it makes 16...Re8 look a bit strange.

19 exf5 Bxf5 (**Diagram 5**)

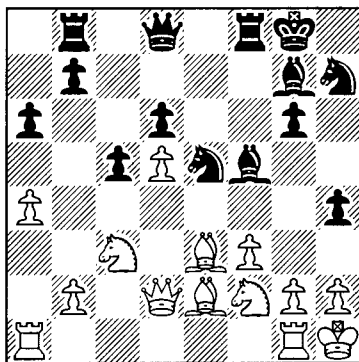


Diagram 5
Black has equalised

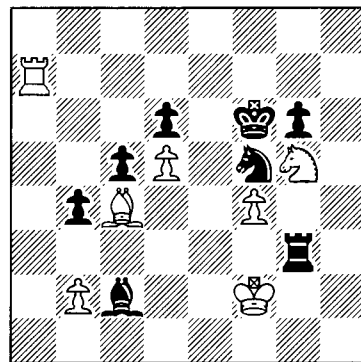


Diagram 6
White threatens mate in one!

Black has escaped the opening with equal play.

20 g4 hxg3 21 hxg3

21 Rxc3!? was worth considering.

21...Qe7 22 Kg2?!

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

22 f4!? Nf7 23 g4 Bd7 24 Rg3 looks better.

22...b5 23 axb5 axb5 24 Bh6

24 g4 Bd3! 25 Bxd3 Nxf3 26 Qe2 Bxc3 27 bxc3 Rbe8 is dangerous for White, but 24 Rh1!? was a possibility.

24...b4 25 Bxg7 Kxg7 26 Ncd1

26 Nce4 was a decent alternative; maybe White feared 26...Bxe4 27 Nxe4 Nxf3!? 28 Bxf3 Rxf3 29 Kxf3 Rf8+ 30 Ke3 Re8! where Black regains her piece. But sometimes you have to enter these kind of positions.

26...Ng5 27 f4

This is very aggressive and probably unjustified. Instead 27 Ne3? runs into 27...Nexf3! 28 Bxf3 Be4!! 29 Bxe4 Rxf2+ 30 Qxf2 Qxe4+ 31 Kf1 Rf8 with a winning position for Black, but 27 Rh1 was a better choice, as after 27...Nexf3? 28 Bxf3 Nxf3 White has 29 Qh6+!.

27...Ne4

Worse is 27...Nc4 28 Bxc4 Bh3+ (28...Be4+? 29 Kf1 Nf3 30 Qe3 does not work) 29 Nxh3 Qe4+ 30 Kf1 Qxc4+ 31 Qe2 Qxe2+ 32 Kxe2 Nxh3 33 Rh1 and the black knight is out of play, even if it doesn't drop off.

28 Qe3 Nxf2 29 Nxf2

29 Kxf2? Rbe8 30 fxe5? Qxe5 31 Qxe5+ Rxe5 leaves the white king in trouble, while 30 Re1 Qd7! would also be a lot better for Black.

29...Nc6 30 Qxe7+ Nxe7 31 Ra7 Rf7 32 Kf3?

The king becomes exposed here. Better was 32 g4 or 32 Bf3.

32...Bc2 33 Ne4 Nf5!

Black plays very aggressively. After 33...Bxe4+ 34 Kxe4 Re8 35 Kf3 Nf5 36 Rxf7+ Kxf7 37 Kf2 it is not clear that White is worse.

34 Rxf7+ Kxf7 35 Ng5+ Kf6 36 Bc4

36 Ra1!? Re8 37 Ra7 does not save White either, because of 37...Nd4+ 38 Kg4 Bf5+ 39 Kh4 Rh8+ 40 Nh7+ Rxh7+ 41 Rxh7 Nxe2 and Black wins.

36...Re8 37 Ra1 Re3+ 38 Kf2 Rxf3 39 Ra7 (Diagram 6) 39...Rxf3!

The white threats of Rf7 or Nh7 mate make this capture forced. But Black is not unhappy to enter the endgame as she retains excellent winning chances.

40 fxf3+ Kxf3 41 Ra8

41 Kf3 Kf6! followed by ...Ke5 also spells trouble for White.

41...Kf4 42 Re8 g5 43 Ba6 g4 44 Bc8 g3+ 45 Kg1 b3 46 Ba6 Be4 47 Bc4 Nd4 48 Rf8+ Ke3 49 Bf1 Bxd5 50 Rf6 Nf3+ 51 Kh1

Or 51 Kg2 Nd2+ 52 Kg1 Nxf1 53 Kxf1 c4 54 Rxd6 Be4 and White has no defence against ...c4-c3.

51...Nd2+ 52 Bg2 Bxg2+ 53 Kxg2 d5 54 Rb6 c4 55 Kxg3 d4 0-1

A player who has contributed a lot to the development of these Sämisch Benoni lines for Black is Igor Glek, now the trainer of prodigy Volokitin. The following game is a great achievement by Glek.

Game 23

□ Khenkin ■ Glek

Münster 1997

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 Nge2 c5 7 Be3 Nc6 8 d5
Ne5 9 Ng3 e6 10 Be2 exd5 11 cxd5 h5

It generally makes more sense for Black to insert 11...a6 12 a4 before starting action on the kingside, and then 12...h5 13 0-0 h4?! (usually Black would wait with this, though as we shall see, it is not clearly faulty) 14 Nh1 Nh7 15 f4 Nd7 16 Nf2 f5 17 Bd3! (strongest, though 17 exf5 gxf5 was also possible with unclear play) 17...fxe4 18 Bxe4 Re8 19 Qd3 Ndf8 20 Rae1 Qf6 21 g4?! (21 f5! was stronger) 21...hxg3 22 hxg3 b5 23 Bg2 Qd8!? (23...bxa4!?) 24 Bc1 Bf5 25 Be4 c4! 26 Qc2 Qd7 27 Bxf5 gxf5 28 Ncd1 Ng6 29 Ne3 Ne7 30 Bd2 Bd4 (Black has taken over the initiative, and the white pieces are not functioning) 31 Rd1 Nf6 (31...Bxe3! 32 Bxe3 Nf6 winning a pawn was justified: there is no reason why the bishop should give White any real compensation) 32 Bc3! Bxc3?! (better 32...Bxe3 33 Bxf6 with even chances) 33 Qxc3 Kf7 34 Nh3 Ne4? (and here 34...Kg6! 35 Ng5 Qa7 with unclear play was better) 35 Ng5+ Nxc5 36 fxc5 Kg8 37 Qf6 Rf8 38 Qh6 (38 Qe6+!? was also bad news for Black) 38...Rf7 39 Ng4! Qa7+ 40 Kg2 fxc4 41 Rxf7 Kxf7 42 Qe6+? (instead 42 Rf1+ Ke8 43 Rf8+ Kd7 44 Qe6+ wins easily) 42...Ke8 43 Rh1?? (43 Re1! and 44 g6 etc. should still win) 43...Qd4! (protecting h8, and surely a big surprise to White) 44 Re1 (too late now) 44...Qd2+ 0-1 Kasimdzhanov-Jens, Hoogeveen 1999.

12 0-0 Nh7 13 Qd2 h4 14 Nh1 g5!? (Diagram 7)

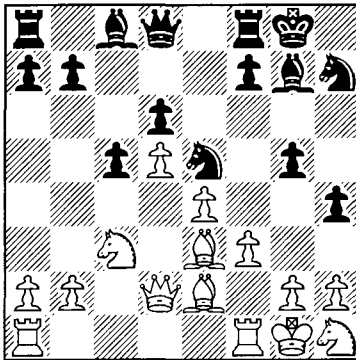


Diagram 7

Another way to play the opening

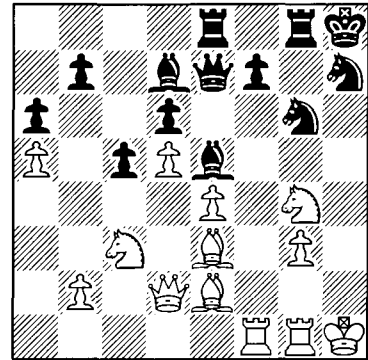


Diagram 8

What now for Black?

15 Nf2 Bd7 16 Kh1 Qf6 17 f4!

White needs to do this before Black takes control over the dark squares.

17...gxf4 18 Bxf4 Rae8!

TIP: Remember to bring all your pieces into play.



Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

19 g3!?

19 Rab1 was another option.

19...Kh8 20 Rg1 Rg8 21 Raf1 hxg3 22 hxg3?!

Planning Rg2-h2, but the idea of getting onto the h-file is simply too slow. Better was 22 Rxc3 Qe7 23 Rfg1 Bf6 with equal play.

22...Ng6!

Now the black pieces come to life.

23 Be3 Qe7

With the idea of ...Be5 and ...Bxc3.

24 a4

White rarely begins play on the queenside in this way.

24...a6

The immediate 24...Be5! was probably stronger.

25 a5

This is clearly a waste of time.

25...Be5 26 Ng4 (Diagram 8)

26 Bg4 Nh4!? leads to a forced draw after 27 Bxd7 Nf3 28 Qd1 Nxc1 29 Bxe8 Rxc3 30 Qh5 Qxe8 31 Rxc1 Rxe3 32 Ng4 Bxc3 33 Nxe3 Qxe4+ 34 Rg2 Qxe3 35 bxc3 Qxc3 36 Qg4 (or 36 Qxf7) 36...Qc1+ 37 Kh2 Qh6+ etc. However, 26...Ngf8! is better, when Black is to be preferred.

26...Bxc3!

Now White is torn apart as his last kingside pawn is lost.

27 Rxc3 Ne5! 28 Rh3

After 28 Bf4 Bxc4 29 Bxc4 Nxc4 30 Qg2 Ne5 Black is a pawn up, though White can still fight.

28...Bxc4 29 Bxc4 Nxc4 30 Rf5 Rg7 31 Rfh5 Nxe3 32 Qxe3 Qf6 33 Rf5 Qd4

33...Qd8!? followed by ...Qxa5 was possibly even stronger.

34 Qf2 Qxf2 35 Rxf2 Kg8 36 Rh4 Ng5 37 Rf6 Rg6 38 Rxc6+ fxc6

Now Black's extra pawn is passed and the endgame is winning fairly easily.

39 Rg4 Re5 40 Kg2 Kg7 41 Kf2 Nf7 42 Rh4 Rh5 43 Rxc5 gxc5 44 Na4 Kf6 45 Nb6 Ng5 46 Ke3 h4 0-1

White Delays Development of the c1-bishop

The line in the following game, though it is certainly eccentric, quite often arises directly by Modern Benoni move order. There is no clear recipe for Black, so here I investigate the bizarre-looking ...Nh5, invented by Glek. Maybe this is the philosopher's stone?

Statistics

From an impressive percentage for White at move 9 of 62% from 216 games, Glek's 9...Nh5!? reduces this to an acceptable 55% from 19 games, which should be seen as natural. Black has good play from the opening, but there is perhaps more pressure on him to prove that his position is tenable.

Game 24

□ Hermansson ■ Wedberg

Stockholm 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3 Bg7 8 Nge2 0-0 9 Ng3

This position can obviously arise in many different ways.

9...Nh5!? (Diagram 9)

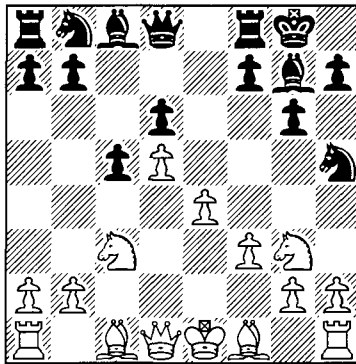


Diagram 9

A crazy-looking knight

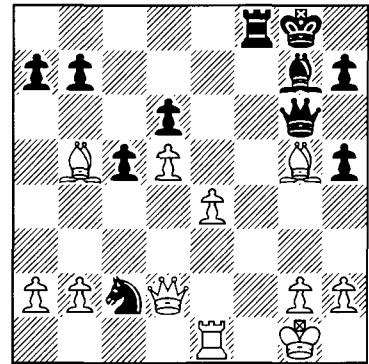


Diagram 10

Black wins material

Actually, Glek first inserted 9...a6 10 a4 and only then 10...Nh5!? (Ward-Glek, German Bundesliga 1997), but the idea is the same. Here we only look at 9...Nh5!?

10 N \times h5

This must be played.

10...g \times h5 11 Be3

11 Bd3 seems more accurate. After 11...f5 12 0-0 Black has tried:

a) 12...Nd7 13 exf5 (or 13 Bc2 Ne5 14 Ne2 Ng6 15 exf5 Bxf5 16 Bxf5 Rxf5 17 Ng3 Rf7 18 N \times h5 Bd4+ 19 Kh1 Qh4 20 f4 Re8 with good play for Black in Khenkin-Reinderman, Ohrid 2001) 13...Ne5 14 f6 Q \times f6 15 Ne4 Qg6 16 Bc2 Bf5 with equal chances in Novikov-Langer, Lindsborg 2002.

b) 12...Na6 (my favourite) 13 a3 (not 13 Bf4? f \times e4 14 fxe4 c4! 15 B \times c4 Qb6+ 16 Kh1 Q \times b2 and White is in trouble, Dreev-Shchekachev, St Pe-

tersburg 1998) 13...Bd7 14 Qc2 Qf6 15 Kh1 Rac8 16 Be3 c4!? (very sharp) 17 Be2 b5 18 Bxa7 Nc5 19 Rad1 Kh8 (19...f4! with compensation was better) 20 Bxc5 Rxc5 21 f4 h4 22 Bf3 Rcc8 23 exf5 Bxf5 24 Be4 Bd7 25 Bxh7 Qh6 26 Bg6 Rxf4 27 Ne2 Rff8 (or 27...Rxf1+ 28 Rxf1 Qg5 with compensation – Glek) 28 Ng1 h3 29 Nxb3 Bxb3 30 gxh3 Rxf1+ 31 Rxf1 Rf8 32 Rxf8+?! (better 32 Bf5! and White keeps the edge) 32...Bxf8 33 Qf2 Bg7 34 Bf5 Qc1+ 35 Kg2 Qxb2 36 Qxb2 Bxb2 and the endgame was drawn in Chernin-Glek, German Bundesliga 1999.

11...f5 12 Qd2 Qf6 13 Bg5 Qg6

Here we see a clear benefit from ...Nh5. The g6-square is very appropriate for the queen.

14 Bd3 Na6 15 0-0 Bd7 16 Rae1 Rae8

TIP: Again we see that the Grandmasters pay great attention to development.

17 Nb5?

17 exf5 Bxf5 18 Rxe8 would have kept the game unclear.

17...fxe4 18 fxe4

If 18 Rxe4 Bxb5 19 Bxb5 Rxe4 20 fxe4 Rxf1+ 21 Kxf1 Qxe4 and Black has won a pawn.

18...Nb4 19 Rxf8+ Rxf8 20 Bc4 Bxb5 21 Bxb5 Nc2! (Diagram 10) 22 Rf1 Bd4+

22...Qxe4!? was also good, as Black can answer Bd3 with ...Qd4+.

23 Kh1 Rxf1+ 24 Bxf1 Qxe4 25 Bh6

If 25 Bd3 Qe1+ 26 Qxe1 Nxe1 27 Bf5 c4! would secure Black excellent winning chances as well.

25...Be3!

The Swedish Grandmaster has evaluated the endgame correctly.

26 Bd3 Bxh6 27 Bxe4 Bxd2 28 Bxc2 Bc1 29 b3 Kg7 30 g3 h6 31 Bd1?!

The wrong plan. White needed to get the king into play, though after 31 Kg2 Kf6 32 Kf3 Ke5 the chances are still with Black.

31...h4 32 Bg4 hxg3 33 hxg3 Kf6 34 Bc8 b6 35 a4

This merely shifts the weakness from a2 to b3, but there was no defence. If 35 Kg2 Ke5 36 Be6 Kd4 37 Kf3 Kc3 38 Ke4 Kb2 39 Kd3 Kxa2 and Black wins.

35...Ke5 36 Bb7 Kd4 37 Kg2 Kc3 38 Ba6 Kxb3 39 Bb5 c4 40 Kf3 c3 41 Ke2 c2 42 Kd3 Bg5 0-1

White Plays 7 Bd3 and 8 Nge2

In the final game of this chapter White refrains from f2-f3 and adopts the more unusual set-up of Bd3 and Nge2. The most common way to reach this line is via the King's Indian once more, i.e. 2...g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5



Bd3 0-0 6 Nge2 c5 7 d5 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5. In this game Miles faces with the Modern Benoni in its true form.

Statistics

After 9...Ng4 Black scores 44% in 63 games, though the highest rated players do well with Black here. After 9...Na6 we have the same score over 264 games, but here White has a close to perfect score between the highest rated players. So therefore my recommendation for 9...Ng4 is based both on statistics and my general feeling for the position. Also the main game is great!

Game 25

□ Miles ■ Perenyi

Porz 1986

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Bd3 Bg7 8 Nge2 0-0 9 0-0 Ng4! (Diagram 11)

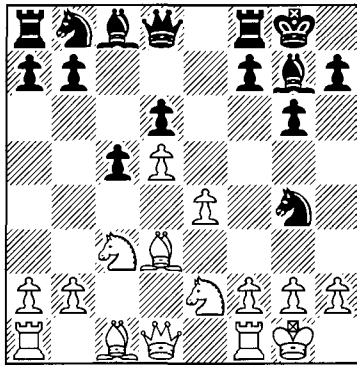


Diagram 11

An aggressive knight sally

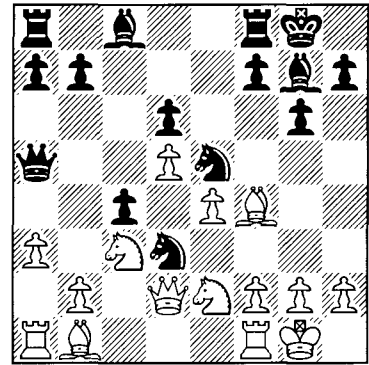


Diagram 12

A great square for a knight

This is certainly a move to recommend, though 9...Na6 is also possible; e.g. 10 h3 Re8 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bh4 g5 13 Bg3 c4 14 Bc2 Nc5 15 f3 Bd7 16 Bf2 Nh5 (16...b5 looks more standard, but Black did not want to invite Ne2-d4-c6 too soon) 17 Bd4 Be5 18 b4 cxb3 19 axb3 a5 20 Qd2 Qf6 21 Bxe5 dxe5 (21...Qxe5!, with the idea of 22 f4 gxf4 23 Nxf4 Ng3!, would probably have been stronger) 22 Na4 Qd6 23 Nxc5 Qxc5+ 24 Kh2 Nf4 25 Bd3 Rec8 26 Nxf4 gxf4 27 g3 Qe3 28 Rad1 Qxd2+ 29 Rxd2 fxd3+ 30 Kxg3 Rc3 31 Rb1 ½-½ Haik-Kasparov, Evry (simul) 1989. This was a simultaneous match against the French olympiad team, which Kasparov won 4½-1½.

10 Bf4

White's other options include:

a) 10 Ng3?! a6! (10...Qh4 does not work yet, due to 11 h3 Nxf2 12 Rxf2

Qxg3 13 Nb5!) 11 a4?! (11 h3 was forced, but Black has good play after 11...Ne5, as either ...b7-b5 or ...Nxd3 will follow) 11...Qh4 12 h3 Nxf2 13 Rxf2 Qxg3 14 Bf4 Qh4 15 Ne2 (White's only chance was 15 Bxd6! Bd4 16 Qf3 Qxf2+ 17 Qxf2 Bxf2+ 18 Kxf2 Re8 19 Bxc5 with some compensation; now it is lost) 15...Qe7 16 Qd2 Nd7 17 Raf1 Ne5 18 Bg5 f6 19 Be3 Bd7 20 b3 b5 21 a5 Nxd3 22 Qxd3 Rae8 23 Ng3 f5 24 Qc2 fxe4 and Black won in Grom-Tolnai, Velden 1993.

b) 10 h3 Ne5 11 Bc2 Na6! and then:

b1) 12 a3!? c4 13 Be3 b6!? (after 13...Re8 14 f4 Nd7 15 Ng3 Ndc5 16 Bd4 Qb6 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Qd4+ f6 19 Rae1 White was better in J.Horvath-Perenyi, Hungarian Championship 1986) 14 f4 Nd3 15 Bxd3 cxd3 16 Qxd3 Nc5 17 Bxc5 (if 17 Qc2 f5!) 17...bxc5 18 Rfe1 Rb8 gave Black counterplay in Zsinka-Perenyi, Hungary 1982.

b2) 12 f4 Nc4 13 b3 (or 13 Bd3!? Na5 14 Ng3 c4 15 Be2 Nc5 16 Be3 with unclear play – Vilela) 13...Na5 14 Be3 b5! 15 e5!? (struggling for equality with 15 Rc1 was the most obvious alternative) 15...dxe5 16 f5 (Nenashev-Shabalov, USSR 1987) and now 16...b4! would have strong, since after 17 fxg6 hxg6 (17...bxc3? 18 gxf7+ is very dangerous for Black) 18 Ne4 f5 19 Nxc5 (or 19 Ng5 f4 and White is lost – Shabalov) 19...Qb6 20 a3! bxa3 (20...Nb7 21 Nxa6) 21 Nc3 Bd7 with a clear advantage to Black.

13...Nb6!? has been played, e.g. 14 f5 (14 Bb2 Bd7 15 Qd2 c4 16 f5 Nb4 17 Bb1 cxb3 18 axb3 a5 19 Rf3 Re8 gives us the usual complicated position in Ivanisevic-Velimirovic, Niksic 1997) 14...Re8 (14...Nb4!? makes more sense, with a possible opening of the f-file) 15 Bf4 Nb4 16 Bb1 (16 fxg6 was better) and now 16...N4xd5! (instead of 16...Bxf5 as in Nemet-Smirin, Geneva 1992) 17 exd5 Rxe2! looks like a winning sequence.

10...Na6! 11 Qd2

11 Bg3 h5! was good for Black in Zsu.Polgar-Perenyi, Fonyod 1983.

11...Ne5 12 Bc2 Nc4 13 Qc1 Nb4 14 Bb1 Ne5 15 Qd1

If 15 Qd2 Black can try 15...f5!? or draw with 15...Nc4 16 Qc1 Ne5.

15...Qa5!

15...c4 16 Qa4! is not something Black should get into.

16 a3 c4 17 Qd2

Here White offered a draw. However, Black is already doing well.

17...Nbd3 (Diagram 12)

TIP: Whenever you have the chance to get such a knight – take it!

18 b4?!

White tries to get the b2-pawn out of harm's way, but it is not a good strategy and just weakens the queenside. Instead 18 Bxd3!? cxd3 19 b4 (not 19 Ng3? Nc4 intending 20...Nxb2) 19...Qb6 20 Ng3 Qd4 21 Nb5 Qb6 22 Nc3 would probably have earned White his draw.

18...Qd8 19 Bxd3

19 Bg5 f6 20 Be3 f5! gives Black good play.



19...Nxd3 20 Bg5

20 Bh6 Bxh6 21 Qxh6 f5! would allow Black to take over the initiative completely. The queen is just offside on h6.

20...Qe8 21 Nc1 f5! 22 Nxd3 cxd3 23 exf5

23 Qxd3 f4! would give Black a great advantage, as there is no defence against ...Qe5. And 23 f3 Qe5 24 Rac1 fxe4 25 Nxe4 Bf5! would also put White under pressure.

23...Bxf5 24 Rfe1 Qc8 25 Rac1 Qc4! 26 Be7 Be5! 27 Ne2!?

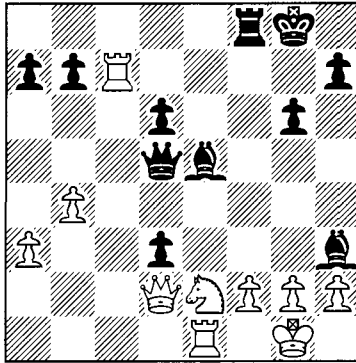
The most aggressive move. Instead 27 Bxf8 Bf4 28 Re3 Rxf8 would give Black great play, since it is not easy for White to free himself. 27 Rxe5 dxe5 28 Bxf8 Rxf8 would not promise well for White either.

27...Qxd5 28 Bxf8 Rxf8 29 Rc7!?

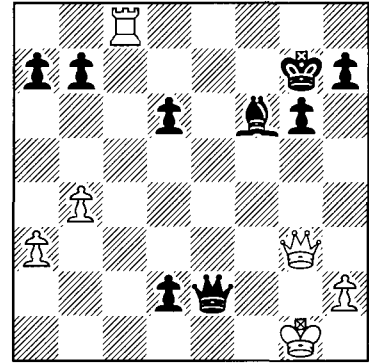
29 Ng3 Bd7 gives Black excellent compensation for the exchange.

29...Bh3!! (Diagram 13)

Like a bolt from the blue!

**Diagram 13**

A remarkable combination

**Diagram 14**

Time trouble leads to errors

30 f3!

Forced. 30 gxh3? loses to 30...Bxh2+ 31 Kxh2 Rxf2+ 32 Kg3 Qf3+ 33 Kh4 Qh5+ 34 Kg3 Rf3+ 35 Kg2 Qxh3+ 36 Kg1 Qg4+ with mate to come.

30...Rxf3!

Threatening ...Rf1+. Not 30...Bxg2? when 31 Qh6! would turn the tables.

31 gxf3

Again the only move. If 31 gxh3? Bxh2+! works again, while after 31 Ng3? (or 31 Nc3?) 31...Qd4+! 32 Kh1 Rf2 the game is over.

31...Qxf3 32 Qg5!

Miles defends well. All other moves lost instantly.

32...Bf6 33 Qg3 d2!

This is truly a key move in the combination.

34 Rec1?

White needed to take his back rank problems more seriously. 34 Rb1? also loses to 34...Qxe2 35 Qxh3 Bd4+ 36 Kh1 Qe4+ etc. The best defence was 34 Rcc1! Qxg3+! (34...Qxe2? fails to 35 Qb3+!, while 34...dxc1Q 35 Rxc1 Qf5 36 Qf4! is not 100% clear either) 35 hxg3 (after 35 Nxc3 Bd4+ 36 Kh1 Bb2 37 Rcd1 dxe1Q+ 38 Rxe1 Bd7 Black has great chances to win the endgame, e.g. 39 Ne4 Bc6 40 b5 Bxb5 41 Rb1 Bd3 42 Rxb2 Bxe4+ 43 Kg1 Kf7 when he has three pawns for the exchange) 35...Bb2! 36 Red1! (not 36 a4? Bxc1!, or 36 Rcd1 dxe1Q+ 37 Rxe1 Bxa3 with excellent winning chances) 36...dxc1Q 37 Nxc1 Bg4 38 Re1 Bf5! (38...Bxa3 39 Nd3! followed by Ra1 gives Black problems, and a draw is likely) 39 a4 and though Black remains better, White has reasonable drawing chances.

34...Qxe2 35 Rc8+

If 35 Qxh3? Bd4+ 36 Kh1 d1Q+! 37 Rxd1 Qxd1+ 38 Kg2 Qg1+ 39 Kf3 Qe3+ 40 Kg4 h5+ 41 Kh4 Bf6 mate.

35...Bxc8 36 Rxc8+ Kg7 (Diagram 14)

36...Kf7! is stronger.

37 Rc7+ Kh6??

Time trouble. Black wins easily with 37...Be7! 38 Rxe7+ (or 38 Qc3+ Kh6! 39 Qh3+ Qh5 40 Qe3+ Bg5 and it is all over) 38...Qxe7 39 Qc3+ Kh6! 40 Qxd2+ Qg5+ reaching a winning pawn ending.

38 Qf4+

Black overlooked this check, noticing only 38 Qh3+.

38...Bg5 39 Qf8+ Kh5 40 Rxh7+ Kg4 41 Qc8+??

Now White blunders in time trouble. (The time control was at move 50.) After 41 h3+! Kg3 42 Qxd6+ it is all over.

41...Kf4 42 Rf7+! Bf6!?

42...Ke3 43 Qe8+ Kd3 44 Qb5+ is a draw, i.e. 44...Ke3 45 Qe8+! with perpetual, but not 45 Qxg5+? Kd4! 46 Rf4+ Kc3 47 Qf6+ Qe5! and Black is winning again after 48 Rf3+ Kb2!.

43 Rxf6+ Kg5 44 Rxc6+!

Not 44 Qd8? Qg4+! 45 Kh1 Qe4+ 46 Kg1 (or 46 Rf3+ Kg4) 46...Qd4+ 47 Rf2+ Kh5! and Black wins, while 44 h4+? just makes things more difficult after 44...Kxh4! 45 Qh8+ Kg5 46 Rxc6+ Kxc6 47 Qg8+. Safest was 44 Rxd6 d1Q+ 45 Rxd1 Qxd1+ with a certain draw.

44...Kxc6 45 Qg8+ Kf5 46 Qf7+ Ke4 47 Qe6+??

Time trouble. White still had a draw here with 47 Qe8+ Kd3 (or 47...Kf3 48 Qh5+) 48 Qb5+ Ke3 49 Qe8+ and Black cannot escape the checks.

47...Kd3 48 Qb3+ Kd4 49 Qb2+ Ke4 50 Qc2+ Ke3

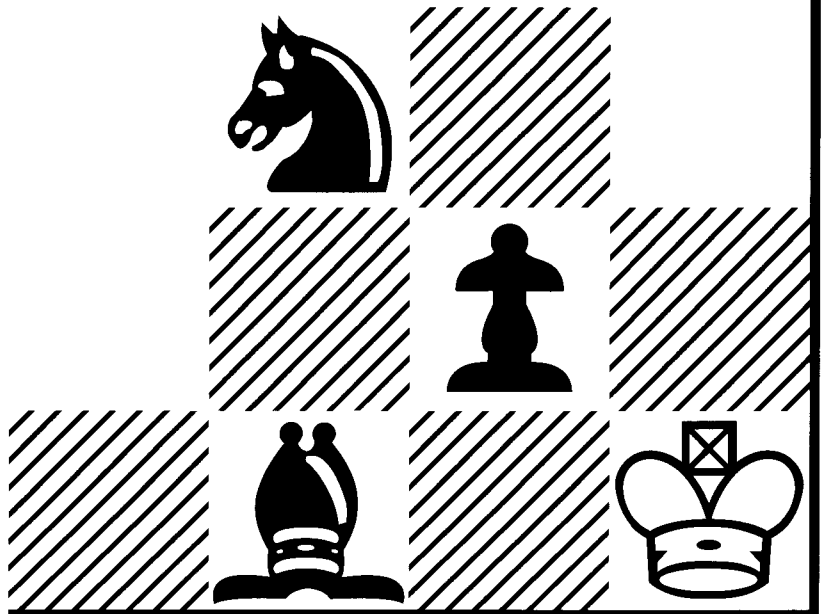
Reaching the time control. Black will spot the winning ...Kf4! second time around.

51 Qb3+ Kd4 52 Qb2+ Ke4 53 Qc2+ Kf4! 0-1

Chapter Five

Systems with f2-f4

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ White Plays 8 e5!?
- ▨ White Plays 8 Nf3 and 9 Be2
- ▨ The Critical 8 Bb5+



Introduction

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 (Diagram 1)

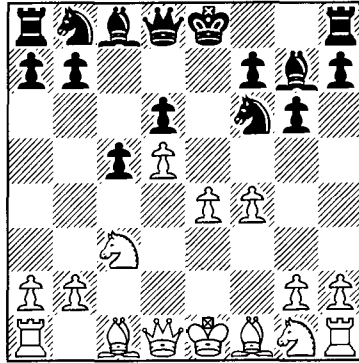


Diagram 1
The aggressive f2-f4 variation

In this chapter we will examine the critical lines where White plays a rapid f2-f4. Most often these come directly from the Modern Benoni, but they can also arise via the King's Indian 2...g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 (the Four Pawns Attack) 5...0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 cxd5, though White then loses some options, notably 8 Bb5+!

Why would White want to Play like this?

He wants to kill you! It is that simple. White players have realised that the Modern Benoni might be defeated with a quick and powerful e4-e5 break. In my opinion this is clearly the most dangerous approach for Black. The immediate 8 e5!? is not too terrifying after 8...Nfd7, while simple development with 8 Nf3 and 9 Be2 does not seriously test Black either. However, the cheeky check 8 Bb5+!, planning to answer 8...Nbd7 or 8...Bd7 with 9 e5!, is very dangerous for Black.

Does this Pose a Real Problem for Black?

Yes! These lines are the reason why players like Suba and De Firmian use the 2...e6 move order, planning to meet 3 Nc3 with the Nimzo-Indian Defence 3...Bb4. However, other players, such as Topalov and Psakhis, sometimes decide to go directly for the Modern Benoni and accept the challenge of the most difficult lines.

Theoretical?

It truly depends what line you want to play. If you play (8 Bb5+) 8...Nbd7

then I would encourage you not only to learn the moves, but also to find improvements of your own. However, 8...Nfd7 should give you normal positions, where calculation and concentration over the board will be more important than anything else. It is always good to have a few ideas, but beyond that I do not believe that theoretical study is so important.

White plays 8 e5!?

White wastes no time and tries to roll Black over straight away. Really, 8 e5!? is a bit too ambitious though, and Black obtains good play after 8...Nfd7.

Statistics

Black has a slight plus after 8...Nfd7 with 52% of the points in 203 games. I believe that the game is level, but it is true that White is slightly uncomfortable and needs to prove a little more than Black. On the other hand, the position still holds dangers for both sides, and there is the game Nakamura-De Firmian in the notes below to consider.

Game 26

□ S.Vukovic ■ T.Petrosian

Barcelona 1980

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 e5!?

8 Nf3 and 8 Bb5+! are considered later in this chapter.

8...Nfd7!

The old Tigran knew how to play such positions. There is no reason to take on e5, as this only opens up for White's pieces.

9 Nb5

9 exd6 0-0 already gives Black good play.

9...dxe5 10 Nd6+ Ke7! (Diagram 2)

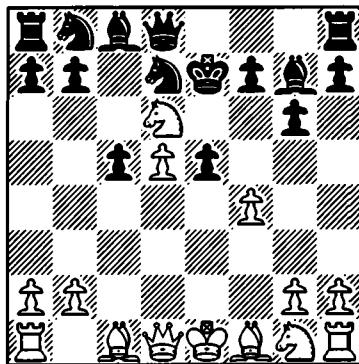


Diagram 2
Don't worry ... be happy

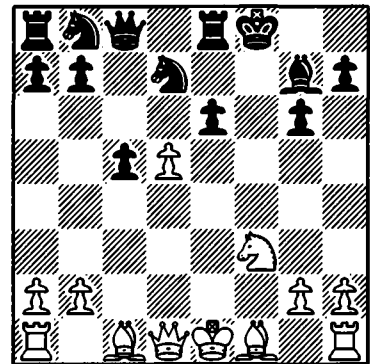


Diagram 3
A critical position

11 Nxc8+ Qxc8

White has managed to exchange his only developed piece for an undeveloped black bishop. It is not surprising that White is already struggling for equality.

12 Nf3

Or 12 d6+ Kf8 13 Nf3 Nc6 14 Be2 h6 (14...e4 15 Ng5 Nf6 16 Bc4 Nd8 followed by ...h6 looks very strong) 15 fxe5 Ndx5 16 0-0 Nxf3+ 17 Bxf3 Bd4+ 18 Kh1 Kg7 (18...Qd7!?) 19 Bd5 Rf8 with a slightly better position for Black in Gipslis-Grigorian, Kishinev 1964.

12...Re8 13 fxe5

White is in trouble after 13 Bc4 Kf8 14 0-0 e4 15 Ng5 Nb6 (or 15...h6!?) 16 Bb5 Rd8 17 Nxf7+ (17 Nxe4 Rxd5 is no good for White) 17...Kg8 18 Ng5 c4! and Black was winning in Meszaros-Stefanov, Satu Mare 1987.

13...Kf8?!

I am not sure this is the right decision. Look at the note for move 15. Instead 13...Nxe5 14 Bb5 Nbd7 15 Nxe5 Kf8 is fine for Black, e.g. 16 0-0 Rxe5 17 Bf4 c4 18 Qd4 Rf5 ½-½ Ivanisevic-Zhang Zhong, Szeged 1997.

14 e6

Worse is 14 Bb5 a6 15 Bxd7 Nxd7 16 e6 fxe6 17 0-0 Kg8 and Black had a clear advantage in Garcia Vicente-Danailov, Alcobendas 1994.

14...fxe6 (Diagram 3) 15 d6?

After this Black is all over his opponent.

a) 15 dxe6! is certainly the most dangerous for Black: 15...Rxe6+ (15...Qc6 16 Be2 Qxe6 17 Ng5! gives White a strong initiative) 16 Be2 Qe8 (if 16...Bf6 17 Bh6+ Kg8 18 0-0 Re8 19 Bc4+ Kh8 20 Ng5 Bxg5 21 Bxg5 looks very dangerous for Black; instead 16...Ke8 17 0-0 Nc6 is the computer's choice, which looks very shaky, but may be playable for Black) 17 0-0 Rxe2 18 Nd4+ Kg8 19 Nxe2 with a clear edge for White in Nakamura-De Firmian, San Francisco 2002.



TIP: Attacks usually arise through a lead in development, but sometimes they can work by dragging the opponent's king into the centre, when he will have to pay a high price for regaining safety. A move like 15 d6? completely loses all chance of creating dangers for the black king.

b) 15 Be2 is also interesting: 15...exd5 (15...Nf6!? is certainly a good try) 16 0-0 Nf6 17 Ng5! Qc6! 18 a4 (or 18 Nxf7+ Kg8 19 Bb5!? Qxb5 20 Nxf6+ Bxf6 21 Rxf6 Kg7 22 Rxf6+! Kxf6 23 Qg4+ Kf7 24 Qf5+ Kg7 with a draw, but not 24...Ke7? 25 Qxd5 Kf6 26 Bh6! and wins – Konikowski) 18...c4 19 Nxf7+ Kg8 20 Nxf6+ Bxf6 21 Rxf6! Qxf6 22 Qxd5+ Qf7 23 Qxf7+ (not 23 Bxc4?? Re1+) 23...Kxf7 24 Bxc4+ Kg7 25 b4 Nc6 26 Bb2+ Kh6! 27 Ra3 Rad8 28 Bf6 Rd1+ 29 Kf2 Rd2+ ½-½ Sobek-Hardicsay, Ostrava 1979.

15...Kg8 16 Bc4 Nc6 17 0-0 Nb6 18 Bb3 Nd4

The d6-pawn is doomed now.

19 Ng5

This is a little too optimistic; after this White is just lost.

19...Qc6 20 Qg4 Nxb3 21 axb3 Qxd6 22 Bf4 Qd7 23 Be3 Bd4 24 Rae1
Re7 25 Kh1 e5 26 Qh4 Nd5 27 Bc1 e4 28 Nxe4 Rae8 29 Ng5 Rxe1 30
Rxe1 Rxe1+ 31 Qxe1 Qe7 32 Qf1 b6 33 Nf3 Bf6 34 Qc4 Qe6 35 h4 Kf8
36 Bh6+ Ke8 37 Bc1 Be7 38 Bg5 a5 39 Bxe7 Kxe7 40 Ng5 Qe1+ 41
Kh2 Qe5+ 42 g3 h6 43 Nf3 Qxb2+ 44 Kh3 Kd6 45 Qg4 Qf6 46 h5 g5 0-1

White Plays 8 Nf3 and 9 Be2

White can also develop steadily with Be2 and 0-0. The next two games of this chapter should illustrate that Black has many ways to play against this system. And I only give two out of a larger range of respectable options.

Statistics

The most played ninth move is 9...Re8 (a huge 1659 games), after which White has a slightly preferable score of 59%. The next in line is 9...Bg4, scoring 51% in 1067 games, which is very respectable indeed. 9...b5!? is not so good with 38% in 358 games. 9...a6, which looks slow, scores better for Black with 46% in 116 games. But now comes the shocker: our first game presents 9...Nbd7! which scores just 41% for White (!) in 89 games. Again, statistics are not everything, but they can lead us to examine certain unexpected possibilities.

Game 27

□ R.Albrecht ■ Perenyi

Berlin 1987

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Nf3
0-0 9 Be2 (Diagram 4)

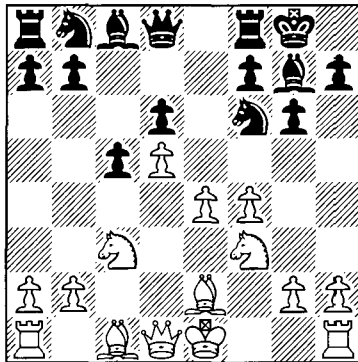


Diagram 4
The Four Pawns Attack

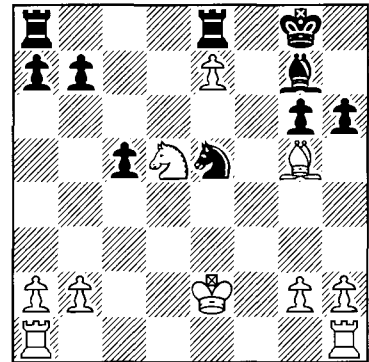


Diagram 5
Black should be fine

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

This position can arise from the King's Indian Four Pawns Attack, as well as the Modern Benoni, to which it belongs. It is a very complex system with many possible lines. Here I have chosen to ignore 9...Re8, 9...b5 and 9...a6, all valid systems, to give an introduction to the two lines I consider the best options.

9...Nbd7

I quite like this actually. It assumes that Black's position is already fine and that White cannot hurt him.

10 e5

The aggressive try.

10 0-0 Re8 11 Qc2 a6 12 a4 Qc7 13 Kh1 (13 Nd2!? was possibly better) 13...c4 14 Nd2 Nc5! (a typical Modern Benoni tactic – here more beautiful than ever!) 15 Bxc4?! (better 15 f5!? Nb3!? 16 Nxb3 cxb3 17 Qd3 Nd7 with unclear play) 15...Ncxe4 16 Ncxe4 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 Bf5 18 Re1 Rac8 19 Bd3 Bxe4 (19...Qxc2 20 Bxc2 Bxe4 21 Bxe4 Rc4 was also strong) 20 Qxc7 Rxc7 21 Rxe4 Rxe4 22 Bxe4 Re7 23 Bd2 Rxe4 24 Re1 (it is necessary to eliminate the rook) 24...Rxe1+ 25 Bxe1 Bxb2 26 Bb4 (White has escaped to a materially equal endgame, but the distant passed pawn is bad news) 26...b5 27 axb5 axb5 28 Bxd6 Bc3 29 Bc5 b4 30 d6 b3 31 d7 Ba5 32 Bd4 f5 33 Bc3 Bd8 34 Kg1 Kf7 35 Kf2 Ke7 36 Ke3 Kxd7 37 Kd3 Kc6 38 Kc4 Bc7 39 Kxb3 (if 39 g3 Bb6 and ..Bg1) 39...Kd5 40 Kc2 Bxf4 41 h3 Ke4 42 Bb4 Bc7 43 Kd2 Kf4 44 Ke2 Kg3 45 Kf1 Bb6 46 Be1+ Kh2 47 Bd2 h5 48 Bf4+ Kh1 49 Bg5 Bc5 50 Bf4 Be7 51 Be5 g5 52 Bc7 Bc5 53 Be5 Be3 54 Bd6 f4 55 Be5 Kh2 56 Bd6 g4 57 hxg4 hxg4 58 Be5 g3 59 Bd6 Kh1 0-1 Semkov-Perenyi, Saint John 1988.

10...dxe5 11 fxe5 Ng4 12 e6

I do not believe that White can bust the black position this easily.

12 Bg5 Qb6 13 0-0 Ndx5 14 Nxe5 c4+ 15 Kh1 Nxe5 16 Be7 Re8 17 d6 Bf5 (17...Qxb2 18 Nd5 would give White compensation) 18 Rxf5!? (18 Nd5 was probably stronger) 18...gxf5 19 Nd5 Qc5 (19...Qxb2 20 Rb1 Qxa2 looks very greedy, but 21 Nc7 c3 22 Ra1 Qb2 23 Rb1 Qd2! seems to win for Black; I have a feeling that these lines are untenable for White in 'advanced chess', where the computer's sense of tactics often helps the defender) 20 b4 Qc6 21 Rc1 Nd3! (Black goes for an equal ending) 22 Bxd3 Qxd5 23 Bxc4 Qxd1+ 24 Rxd1 Bf8 25 Bb5 Bxe7 26 Bxe8 Rxe8 27 dxe7 Rxe7 and if anyone is better here then it is Black. Instead, White proved that he has a fantastic understanding of the endgame: 28 Kg1 Rc7 29 a3 Kg7 (29...Rc3 is an immediate draw, which indicates that Black is trying to win with his extra pawn) 30 Rd3 Kf6 31 Kf2 Ke5 32 Rh3 f6 (32...Rc2+ draws again) 33 Re3+ Kd5 34 Kf3 b6 35 Kf4 Kd4 (35...Rc2 should still draw comfortably) 36 Rh3 Rc3 37 Rxh7 Rxa3 38 Kxf5 Kc4? (38...Ra2 should still draw) 39 Rh4+ Kb5 40 Kxf6 Ra4 41 Rh7 Ra6 (did Black really play this?!) 42 g4 Kxb4 43 g5 Kc5 1-0 Motylev-Kobelev, Ekaterinburg 1996.

12...fxe6 13 dxe6 Nde5 14 Qxd8 Rxd8 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 e7 Re8 17 Nd5 Bg4 18 Bg5?!

18 Bb5! was stronger, after which the position would be very unclear.

18...Bxe2 19 Kxe2 h6 (Diagram 5)

Now the position should be OK for Black.

20 Bf6 Nd7 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Kd3 Rac8 23 Rae1 Rc6?

It was necessary to expel the white knight by 23...Nb6 24 Nxb6 (or 24 Nf4 g5 25 Ne6+ Kg8) 24...axb6 25 Re5 (if 25 Kc4 Rc7 or 25 Re6 Rc6) 25...Rc7 26 Rhe1 b5 when the position would have remained even.

24 Re2??

This just blunders the knight. After 24 Kc4! Black would be in difficulties, since if 24...Nb6+? 25 Nxb6 Rxb6 26 Kxc5! Rxb2 27 Kd6 Rd2+ 28 Ke6 and 29 Rhf1 wins, or else 28...Rc8 29 Rc1 Rxc1 30 Rxc1 Re2+ 31 Kd7 Rd2+ 32 Ke8 followed by Rc7-d7 etc.

24...Rd6 25 Kc4 b5+ 26 Kxb5 Rxd5 27 Kc6 Rd4 28 Rf1 c4 29 Re6 Rd2 30 g4 Nb8+ 31 Kc5 Rxb2 32 Kxc4 Rxa2 33 Rff6 Ra4+ 0-1

The next game follows one of the critical lines of the 9...Bg4 variation. I believe that this is the most solid choice for Black and that his prospects after the opening should not be inferior.

Game 28

□ **Cebalo** ■ **Balcerak**

Biel 2000

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 cxd5 Bg4

The preferred move of the top players.

10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Re1

11 h3 Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Re8 usually transposes with 13 Re1, though also possible is 13 g4!? h6 14 h4 with very unclear play.

11...Re8 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Bxf3 Qa5

13...Rc8 is also possible with the idea 14 Be3 b5! (14...c4 15 Kh1 Nc5 16 Bxc5 Rxc5 17 e5 favours White) 15 Nxb5 Nxe4 16 Bxe4 (if 16 Nxa7?! Ra8 17 Nc6 Qb6 with good play for the pawn) 16...Rxe4 17 Nxd6 Rxe3 18 Rxe3 Bd4 19 Qf3 Rb8 20 Kh2 (or 20 Nc4 Rb4 21 Rc1 Nb6 22 Nxb6 axb6 and Black is doing well) 20...Nf6! 21 Nc4 (or 21 Ne4 Bxe3 22 Nxf6+ Qxf6 23 Qxe3 Qxb2 with equality – Nogueiras) 21...Bxe3 22 Qxe3 Qxd5 23 Qe5 Re8! 24 Qxd5! Nxd5 25 f5! Kg7 26 Rd1 Nf6 27 fxg6 hxg6 28 Rd2 Re1 29 Nd6 Ne4 30 Nxe4 ½-½ Nogueiras-Kasparov, Barcelona 1989.

14 Be3

Or 14 g4 h6 15 h4 c4 16 g5 hxg5 17 hxg5 Nh7 18 Be3 Nc5 19 Bxc5 Qxc5+ 20 Kg2 b5 with chances for both sides in Vaissier-Al.David, France 1997.

14...b5 15 a3 (Diagram 6)

Cebalo has played several games with this variation, but does not seem to have enjoyed that much success.

15...Nb6 16 Bf2

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

One of two main lines. The other is 16 e5!? Nc4! (forced, since 16...dxe5 17 fxe5 Rxe5 18 Bxc5 is very good for White) 17 exf6 Nxe3 18 Rxe3 Rxe3 19 fxg7 Rae8 which has been played in many games. The position is very complicated and I cannot do it justice here. I will only say that 20 f5 and 20 Qd2 are the two main moves, and the latter is probably more dangerous for Black.

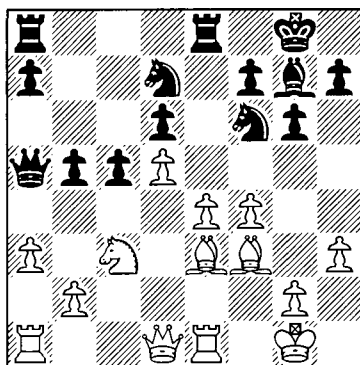


Diagram 6

Black has no real difficulties

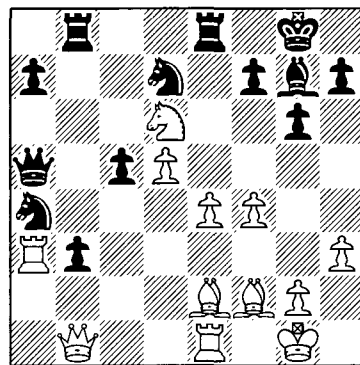


Diagram 7

How should Black proceed?

16...Nc4 17 Qc2 Nd7 18 Be2

Not 18 a4? b4 19 Nb5 a6! with a better game for Black after 20 Qxc4 axb5 21 Qxb5 Qxb5 22 axb5 Bxb2 (Stohl), e.g. 23 Ra6 Rxa6 24 bxa6 Ra8 25 Rb1 Bc3 26 Be2 Nb8 and White is struggling.

18...Rab8 19 a4

If 19 Nxb5!? Qxb5! (not 19...Rxb5? 20 b4! with advantage to White) 20 Ra2!? (or 20 Bxc4 Qxb2 21 Qxb2 Rxb2 with even chances) 20...Ne3! 21 Bxe3 Qb3! 22 Qxb3 Rxb3 23 Bf3 Bxb2 and I prefer Black.

19...b4! 20 Nb5

After 20 Bxc4 bxc3 21 b3 a6 22 Rec1 Nb6 23 Bf1 c4! 24 Bxc4 (if 24 b4 Qxb4 25 a5 Nd7 26 Rcb1 Qb3! 27 Rxb3 cxb3 and the pawns win) 24...Nxc4 25 bxc4 Rb2 26 Qd3 Rd2 27 Qf3 f5 Black was clearly better in Kozul-Nunn, Wijk aan Zee 1991. While 20 Nd1?! is punished by 20...Na3! 21 Qd2 (if 21 Qc1 Rxe4! 22 bxa3 Bxa1 23 Qxa1 Qxa4 and Black should win, since the white bishops have no scope) 21...Qxa4! with ideas such as 22 Ra2 Nb1 23 Rxa4 Nxd2 24 Rxa7 Nf6 and Black is much better.

20...Nxb2 21 Nxd6 b3 22 Qb1

The only move.

22...Nxa4

22...Red8!? is also possible; again the position is very complicated.

23 Ra3 (Diagram 7)

Instead 23 e5!? (not 23 Nxe8? Bxa1 24 Qxa1 b2 25 Qa2 Qxe1+ 26 Bxe1

b1Q and wins – Nunn) 23...b2 24 Ra2 Red8 is unclear. I do not think that Black can be worse here.

23...c4!?

A very risky decision that paid off in this game, but cannot be recommended when Black has strong safe alternatives:

a) 23...Qb4 24 Rxb3! Qxb3 25 Qxb3 Rxb3 26 Nxe8 is unclear according to Vaissier, though ‘even’ is perhaps a better evaluation.

b) 23...Red8! is the strongest move according to my analysis: 24 Rxb3 Nc3 25 Nc4 Qa6 26 Rxb8 Rxb8 27 Qc2 (27 Qd3 Nxe2+ 28 Rxe2 Rb4 29 Ne5 c4 is promising for Black) 27...Rb4 (27...Nxe2+! 28 Qxe2 Rb4 was strongest, giving White serious problems after 29 Nd2 Qxe2 30 Rxe2 a5) 28 Bf1 Rxc4 29 Bxc4 Qxc4 30 e5 Qb4 31 e6 fxe6 32 dxe6 Nf6 33 Qd3 c4 34 Qd8+ Qf8 35 e7 Qe8 36 Qd4 Ncd5 37 Qxc4 Qf7 38 Qc8+ Ne8 39 Bxa7 h5 40 Bc5 Nxf4 41 g3 Nd5 42 Rf1 Bf6 43 Qd7 ½-½ Cebalo-Mohr, Rabac 2003.

24 Nxe8 Bf8 25 d6

Another line was 25 Ra1!? Rxe8 (not 25...c3? 26 Bd1! and White wins) 26 Bxc4 b2 27 Ra2 Bc5 with unclear play.

25...Qb4 26 Rxa4 Qxa4 27 Nc7 c3 28 e5?!

After this White is definitely worse. 28 Nd5! was the right move, when the position is very hard to analyse, even with a computer, as they do not understand compensation very well. One line following the trail of the computer suggests that Black is in trouble: 28...c2 29 Qb2 Qxe4 30 Bf3 Qc4 31 Ne7+ Bxe7 32 dxe7 Re8 33 Qa3 Qxf4 34 Bd5 Ne5 35 Be3 Qg3 36 Re2 Nd3 37 Bxb3 c1Q+ 38 Bxc1 Nxc1 39 Bxf7+ Kxf7 40 Rf2+ and White wins. However, I am sure Black has reasonable alternatives on the way; simply 29...Bxd6 looks like an improvement.

28...Qxf4 29 Nb5?

But 29 Bd1 c2 30 Bxc2 bxc2 31 Qxc2 Nxe5 also leaves Black with a clear advantage.

29...c2 30 Qxb3 c1Q 31 Rxc1 Qxc1+ 32 Kh2 Nxe5

Black is simply winning.

33 Qd5 Nd7 34 Bxa7 Rc8 35 Bf2 Qb2 36 Qf3 Qf6 37 Qg3 Qe5 38 Qxe5 Nxe5 39 Bd4 f6 40 Bxe5 fxe5 41 d7 Rd8 42 Bg4 Bc5 43 Kg3 h5 44 Be6+ Kf8 45 h4 Ke7 46 Bh3 Rb8 47 Nc7 Rb3+ 48 Kh2 Bf2 49 g3 Bxg3+ 50 Kg2 Bxh4 51 Ne6 Rg3+ 0-1

The Critical 8 Bb5+!

From here on we will discuss the dangerous bishop check on the eighth move, which has the aim of disrupting Black’s development. The point is that after the natural blocks, 8...Nbd7 or 8...Bd7, the advance 9 e5 becomes much stronger since the f6-knight is unable to retreat to d7. Thus Black usually elects to play 8...Nfd7 straight away.

Statistics

In 279 games with 8 Bb5+ Nbd7 White has a good score of 58%. Actually this is less terrible than one might have assumed from my introduction to this chapter. But after the further 9 e5 dxe5 10 fxe5 Nh5 11 e6 Qh4+ 12 Kd2!, which Black must be ready to enter when playing 8...Nbd7, White has a brilliant score of 71%. A fabulous novelty could change the evaluation of the line completely of course, but I do not trust it. And after 12 g3 White still retains a good score of 62%. (The unfortunate 12 Kf1? unsurprisingly comes in last with 0%.)

The most popular move is 8...Nfd7, and with good reason. Not only is the position more or less playable for Black (it is good enough for Topalov – is it good enough for you?), it also gives Black a reasonable score of 41%. OK, this may not be quite enough for a solid opening, but statistics can be disregarded a little when you play a risky dynamic opening. Then it is more important that the chances of winning the game are increased, rather than that the overall percentage score is as high as can be. Furthermore, those who play the variation badly should not put you off playing it yourself.

After 9 Nf3 White has a normal score with 55% after both 9...0-0 and 9...a6. Here I have decided to show just 9...a6, as I find it the most principled move. In the main line 9 a4 White has a good score of 61%, with the points balanced out over all Black's ninth move options. The important point is probably that if you play the Modern Benoni by the direct route (2...c5), you need to know critical lines like this quite well.

Game 29

□ Mascarenhas ■ J.Brooks

Correspondence 2002

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+! (Diagram 8)

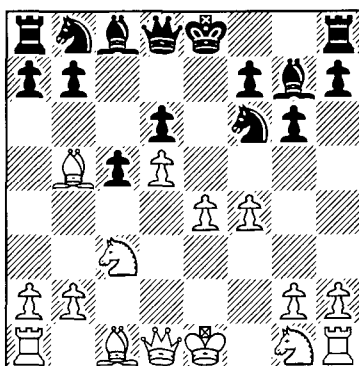


Diagram 8
A very dangerous line

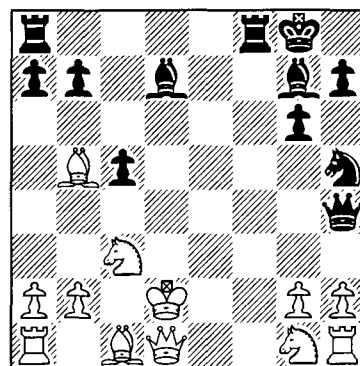


Diagram 9
Perhaps the critical 8...Nbd7 position

This is probably White's most dangerous line against the Modern Benoni all together.

8...Nbd7?!

This line might be on the way out. It would be great to play like this, but I simply cannot make it work, and deep inside I cannot make myself believe in it.

9 e5 dxe5 10 fxe5 Nh5 11 e6!

The critical variation. The greedy 11 Nf3 0-0 12 g4 gives Black good play 12...Nxe5! 13 Nxe5 (or 13 gxh5 Bg4) 13...Bxe5 14 gxh5 Qh4+ 15 Kd2 Bg4.

11...Qh4+ 12 Kd2!

This move is relatively new. The usual 12 g3 was also considered to be better for White, although in the long variations Black's prospects were improving. 12 Kd2 looks more dangerous, if not actually close to winning.

Instead 12 g3 Nxc3 13 hxc3 Qxh1 14 Be3 Bxc3+ 15 bxc3 a6 16 exd7+ Bxd7 17 Bxd7+ Kxd7 18 Qb3 (18 Qf3 Qxf3 19 Nxf3 is fairly even) 18...b5 19 0-0-0 Rhe8 (the immediate 19...Qg2!? was probably better) 20 Bxc5 (20 Bf4! is the recommendation for White here; G.Pyrrich-I.Brooks, correspondence 1997 continued 20...Qg2 21 Qa3 Rec8 22 Qa5 g5 23 Bxc5 Qxc3 24 Bd2 Re8 with a very complicated game, later drawn) 20...Qg2! (after this move Black is OK; worse was 20...Rac8 21 Bd4 Qg2?! 22 Qa3! Qxc3 23 Qxa6 Rxc3+ 24 Kb2 Rcc8 25 Qxb5+ Kd6 26 Ka1! Qa3 27 Bb2 Qc5? 28 Qa6+ Kd7 29 Qa4+ 1-0 I.Sokolov-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1996) 21 d6 (or 21 a4 Rab8! 22 d6 Re6 with good play for Black in Van der Stricht-Schuermans, Belgium 2002) 21...Re6 22 Nh3!? Qxh3 23 Qd5 Rb8 24 Ba7 Qh6+ 25 Kb1 Qf8 26 g4! Qe8 27 Bxb8 Qxb8 28 Rf1 Qxd6 29 Rxf7+ Ke8 ½-½ Lautier-Degraeve, Clichy 2001.

12...fxe6

After 12...Bh6+? 13 Kc2 Bxc1 14 Rxc1 a6 15 exd7+ Bxd7 16 Bxd7+ Kxd7 17 Nf3 Qf6 18 Kb1 White won in Kasparov-Anagnostopoulos, Patras (simul) 2001.

13 dxe6 Bxc3+?!

The critical line is probably 13...0-0! 14 exd7 (14 Nf3 Rxf3 15 Qxf3 Ne5 16 Qd5 Qe7 17 Bd7 Nf4 18 Qe4 Nxe6 19 Bxc8 Rxc8 20 Kc2 Nd4+ 21 Kb1 is probably slightly better for White) 14...Bxd7 (**Diagram 9**) (after 14...Bxc3+!? 15 Kxc3 Qb4+ 16 Kc2 Qxb5 17 Qd5+ Kh8 18 Qe5+ Ng7 19 dxc8Q Rxc8 20 Nf3 Rce8 21 Qc3 I do not believe in the black attack, but I might be wrong) and now:

a) 15 Nf3 Bxc3+ 16 bxc3 Rxf3?! (after 16...Bxb5 17 Nxh4 Rad8+ 18 Ke1 Rde8+ 19 Be3 Rxe3+ 20 Kd2 Rd3+ Black is probably OK) 17 Qxf3 Bxb5 18 Qd5+ Kh8 19 Kc2 (simply 19 Qxc5! Re8 20 Qd4+ Qxd4+ 21 cxd4 Re2+ 22 Kc3 looks better for White) 19...Rd8 20 Qe5+ Ng7 21 Be3 Bd3+ (Black does not do anything with the initiative and so loses easily; instead 21...Re8 22 Qxc5 Qe4+ is unclear) 22 Kb2 Re8 23 Qxc5 Qa4 24 Rhe1 b5 25 Rac1 a5 26 Bd4 1-0 Karayannis-Alexakis, Athens 2001.

b) 15 Bxd7 (the critical move) 15...Rf2+ (hopeless was 15...Rad8? 16 Kc2 Rf2+ 17 Kb1 Bxc3 18 Qg4 Bf6 19 Nh3 Rxd7 20 Nxf2 1-0 Aleksandrov-Wojtkiewicz, Wisla 1992) 16 Nge2 Rd8 (if 16...Bxc3+ 17 Kxc3 Qb4+ 18 Kd3 Rf7 19 Be6 Rd8+ 20 Ke3 Rxd1 21 Rxd1 Nf6 22 Kf2 with advantage for White – Vaisser) and then:

b1) 17 Kc2? Bxc3! 18 Qd5+ Kh8 19 bxc3? (19 Qe6 was the last try) 19...Rxe2+ 20 Kb3 (or 20 Bd2 Nf6 and Black wins) 20...b5 21 g4 Qe7 22 Bxb5 Rxd5 23 Bxe2 Qxe2 24 gxh5 Rd6 0-1 Hway Ik Oei-Wojtkiewicz, Antwerp 1993.

b2) 17 Qb3+ c4 18 Qb5 Kh8 19 Rd1 Nf4 20 g3 Bxc3+ 21 Kxc3 Nxe2+ 22 Kb4 Qf6 23 Bg5? (but if 23 Qxc4 a5+ 24 Ka3 Qe7+ 25 Kb3 b5!; possibly 23 Kxc4!? is necessary) 23...Qxb2+ led to a long king hunt: 24 Kc5 Qe5+ 25 Kb4 a5+ 26 Kxa5 Ra8+ 27 Kb6 Qb8 28 Qb2+ c3 29 Qb3 Nd4 30 Qd5 Qa7+ 31 Kc7 b5+ 32 Kd6 Qb6+ 33 Bc6 Nf5+ 34 Ke6 Ng7+ 35 Kd6 Ne8+ 36 Ke7 Qc7+ 37 Bd7 Qd8+ 38 Ke6 Re2+ 39 Kf7 Nd6+ 40 Qxd6 Qg8+ 41 Kf6 Qg7mate (0-1) J.Ivanov-Cheparinov, Seville 2004.

b3) 17 Qa4! Qxa4 (if 17...Bxc3+ 18 Kxc3 Qf6+ 19 Kc2 Rxe2+ 20 Kb1 and the black attack does not seem to work) 18 Nxa4 Rxd7+ 19 Ke1 Rxc2 20 Kf1 Rg4 21 Nac3 with a slight edge for White.



TIP: In these kinds of lines where Black sacrifices a piece it is necessary for him to play with the utmost pace and flexibility. A move like 13...Bxc3?! fails on the flexibility criterion. A strong attacking player will always try to make 13...0-0 work in this position.

14 bxc3 0-0 15 Nf3! Qg4

Nothing else is any better:

a) 15...Rxf3? 16 Qxf3 Ne5 17 Qd5 and White is winning. S.Ernst-Van der Poel, Dieren 2002 concluded 17...Qf6 18 Re1 Bxe6 19 Qxe5 Rd8+ 20 Kc2 Bf5+ 21 Kb2 Qb6 22 a4 a6 23 Bg5 Rc8 24 Qe8+ Rxe8 25 Rxe8+ Kf7 26 Rae1 1-0.

b) 15...Qf2+ 16 Qe2 Qxe2+ 17 Kxe2 Re8 18 Kf2 Rxe6 19 Bc4 does not give Black enough for the exchange, even though the game is far from over.

16 Re1!

After 16 exd7?! Bxd7 17 Bxd7 Qxg2+ Black has a lot of counterplay. Instead White does not allow Black to develop his queenside. This concept seems to bury this line.

16...Nf4

If 16...Qxg2+ 17 Qe2 Qxf3 18 Qxf3 Rxf3 19 exd7 Bxd7 20 Bxd7 Rd8 21 Ke2 Rxc3 22 Be6+ and the bishops give White a great ending.

17 e7! Re8 18 Qb3+ Kg7

Not 18...Kh8? 19 Qf7 and White wins.

19 c4! Qxg2+

19...Nxc2 20 Qc3+ Kg8 21 Bb2 Qf4+ 22 Kd1 is also hopeless for Black.

20 Kd1 Nf6 21 Bxe8 Bg4 22 Bc6! bxc6 23 Bxf4 Bxf3+ 24 Kc1 Re8 25 Rb1 Be4 26 Rb2 Qg4 27 Qe3

27 Bd6! would have won easily. Instead White had to win a clearly better endgame.

27...Bf5!? 28 Be5 Qxc4+ 29 Qc3 Qxc3+ 30 Bxc3 Kf7 31 Bxf6 Kxf6 32 Rb7 a5 33 Ra7 Be6 34 Rxa5 Rxe7 35 a4 Rb7 36 Rxc5 Bd5 37 Re3 g5 38 a5 g4 39 a6 Ra7 40 Ra5 h5 41 Ra4 Kf5 42 Kd2 h4 43 Rd3 Kg5 44 Rdd4!+- Bf3 45 Ke3 Re7+ 46 Kd3 Ra7 47 Ra5+ Kg6 48 Rf4 c5 49 Ke3 c4 50 Kf2 c3 51 Rc4 Kf6 52 Rxc3 h3 53 Rxf3+ gxf3 54 Kxf3 1-0

The next game illustrates a more cautious approach from Black. I really like the concept of the queen check on h4, which disturbs the white structure a little bit. The game is typical for Psakhis, always wrestling for the full point. His moves are not classical in style, but they work!

Game 30

□ Lukacs ■ Psakhis

Sarajevo 1981

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+ Nfd7

8...Bd7?! also runs into 9 e5! and then:

a) 9...Nh5 10 Nf3 0-0 11 Bxd7 Qxd7 12 0-0 Na6 (or 12...Rd8 13 Qe1 Re8 14 Qh4 dxe5 15 fxe5 Bxe5 16 Nxe5 Rxe5 17 Bh6 Na6 18 g4 Nb4 19 Rae1 with a clear advantage to White in Guseinov-Saud, Dubai 1999; it did not have to go that bad so quickly, but the line does not seem to be trustworthy) 13 Re1 Rae8 14 a3 with an edge for White in Hertneck-Vlahopoulos, Katerini 1993.

b) 9...dxe5 10 fxe5 Qe7 and now the strongest line is probably 11 Nf3 0-0 (11...Ng4 12 Bg5 f6 13 d6 is bad news for Black) 12 Bg5! h6 13 d6 Qe6 14 Bxf6! Bxf6 15 Qe2 Bg7 16 Bc4 Qf5 17 Nd5 Nc6 18 Nc7 Nxe5! (this gives Black some compensation, but is it enough?) 19 Nxe5 Qxe5 (not 19...Bxe5? 20 Rf1 Bf4 21 Nd5! and White wins) 20 Nxa8 Rxa8 21 Qxe5 Bxe5 22 0-0 and White has good winning chances.

9 Bd3

9 Be2 is fairly harmless, e.g. 9...0-0 10 Nf3 Na6 11 0-0 Nc7 12 Kh1 Re8 with unclear play in Vera-Kovacevic, Cullera 2001. Actually White's score is still reasonable with 56% after 9...0-0, albeit over a relatively small amount of games. Instead 9...Qh4+!? is another way for Black to play that the statistics favour.

9...Qh4+!? (Diagram 10)

This move is what keeps the Modern Benoni alive. Black accepts that White has a big centre, but claims some weakening of the kingside.

10 g3 Qe7 11 Nf3 0-0 12 0-0 Nb6!?

A computer move – before the age of the computers.

13 Kg2

13 f5 N8d7 14 Bg5 was an alternative. The answer was 14...f6 15 Bc1 Ne5 with equal play.

13...Bg4

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

13...Na6!? 14 f5! is perhaps not as dangerous for Black as Psakhis thought.

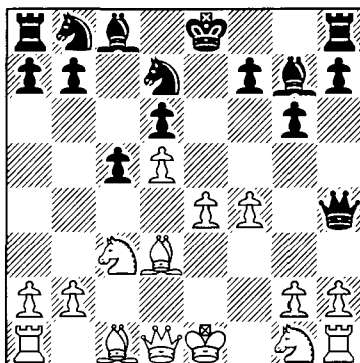


Diagram 10

White must weaken the kingside slightly

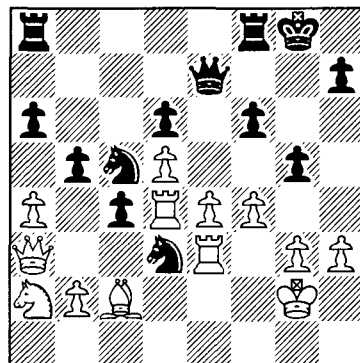


Diagram 11

White is in big trouble

14 h3 Bxf3+ 15 Qxf3 N8d7

Black has achieved a normal Benoni set-up. There is no reason why his position should be worse.

16 a4 c4 17 Bc2 Nc5 18 Be3 Nbd7 19 Rad1

Planning e4-e5 and d5-d6.

19...a6! 20 Bd4?

Better to have continued as planned with 20 e5 dxe5 21 d6 Qf6 when the position is unclear play.

20...Bxd4 21 Rxd4 b5! 22 Re1

22 axb5 axb5 23 Nxb5 Rfb8 gives Black good play.

22...f6!

Black can play this now he no longer has a bishop on g7. Instead

22...Qf6?! 23 e5! is good for White.

23 Na2?

Too optimistic, and overlooking an important tactic. 23 Qe3!? was better.

23...Ne5! 24 Qa3

Of course 24 fxe5? fxe5 does not work, but 24 Qc3! Ned3 25 Bxd3 Nxd3 26 Re2 was still not so clear, though 26...Nc5 27 axb5 axb5 28 Nb4 Ra1 looks more attractive for Black.

24...Ned3 25 Re3 g5! (Diagram 11)

White is being killed on the dark squares.

26 Bxd3 Nxd3 27 Nb4

27 f5 Qe5 is also bad news.

27...gxf4

White's position is falling apart.

28 Nc6 Qg7 29 Rxd3 cxd3 30 Qxd3 Rae8!

30...Qxg3+? 31 Qxg3+ fxc3 32 Kxg3 would be not clear at all, as the rooks cannot easily get into the game.

31 g4 f5! 0-1

After 32 exf5 Re3 33 Qf1 Rxf5 White has no chance.

Strangely enough there is hardly a convincing example how to play with Black against the following set-up. Milov is an enthusiastic follower of this 9 Nf3 variation, and has very good results with it! The overall results are perhaps not too terrifying, but again I think that we should focus more on analysing the variations than the statistics!

Game 31

□ Milov ■ Cebalo

Bastia (rapid) 2003

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+ Nfd7 9 Nf3!

I believe that this move will cause Black most problems in the future. White wants to play quickly in the centre and, for that reason, is not afraid of Black playing ...a6 and ...b5.

9...a6 10 Bd3 b5 11 0-0 0-0 12 a3! (Diagram 12)

This is more dangerous for Black than 12 Kh1 (prophylaxis against any ...c4 and ...Qb6+ ideas) 12...b4 (if now 12...c4 13 Bc2 Nc5 14 f5 with an attack) 13 Na4 Nb6 14 Nxb6 Qxb6 15 Nd2! Qd8 (15...Nd7 16 Nc4 Qc7 17 f5 Re8 was Milov-Totsky, Moscow 1991, and now 18 Bg5! would give White good prospects) 16 Nc4 a5 17 e5!?! (17 Qf3 Ba6 is probably not so bad for Black) 17...dxe5 18 fxe5 Ba6 19 d6 Nd7 20 Bf4 Bxc4 21 Bxc4 Nxe5 (better than 21...Bxe5? 22 Qd2! with a clear edge for White in Milov-Uritzky, Israel 1994) 22 Qd5 (not 22 Bxe5? Bxe5 23 Rxf7 Rxf7 24 Qd5 Qh4! and Black wins) 22...Nxc4 23 Qxc4 Bxb2 24 Rae1 with a very unclear position.

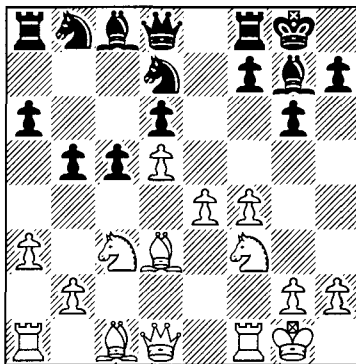


Diagram 12
Another critical variation

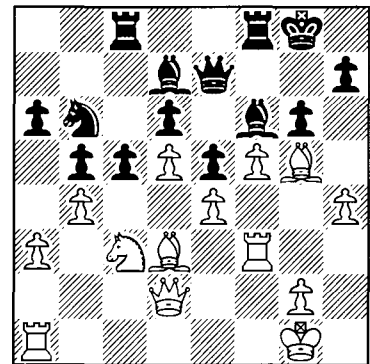


Diagram 13
Black must be careful

12...Nb6

Milov has faced several other moves:

a) 12...Re8 13 Kh1 Nb6 14 f5 N8d7 15 Bg5 Bf6 16 Qd2 Ne5 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 Nxe5 Rxe5 19 fxg6 Qxg6 20 Rf3 gave White a clear advantage in Milov-Gonzalez Tedin, Madrid (rapid) 2002.

b) 12...c4 13 Bc2 Nc5 14 Be3 Qc7 (14...Bg4 15 Bxc5 dxc5 16 e5 does not look encouraging, but 14...Nbd7!? could be an improvement) 15 Qe1 Bg4 16 Nd4 Nd3 17 Qh4 Bc8 18 f5 with a strong attack in Milov-Rodriguez Aguilera, Dos Hermanas 2004.

c) 12...Nf6 13 Qe1 Nbd7 14 Kh1 Bb7 15 Qh4 Re8 16 Re1 h6 17 Bd2 Rc8 18 Rad1 Nh7 19 Qf2 Ndf6 20 h3 Rc7 21 Rc1 c4 22 Bc2 Rce7 was probably not too bad for Black in Milov-Sevillano, Las Vegas 2003.

13 f5!? N8d7

Here 13...gxf5!? 14 Bg5 f6 15 Bf4 b4! looks good for Black. What had White intended?

14 Bg5 f6

Not 14...Qc7?! 15 Qe1 c4 16 Bc2 gxf5 17 Nh4! and White has a very strong attack on the kingside.

15 Bf4 Ne5 16 b4! Bd7 17 h4 Qe7 18 Nxe5 fxe5 19 Bg5 Bf6 20 Qd2 Rac8 21 Rf3 (Diagram 13) 21...cxb4?!

A strategic mistake. After 21...Kh8 22 Raf1 gxf5 23 exf5 then 23...cxb4 would make a lot more sense. 21...gxf5 22 exf5 Kh8 was also interesting, as 23 Ne4?! Bxg5 24 Qxg5 Qxg5 25 hxg5 c4 26 Bc2 Nxd5 should be fine for Black.

22 axb4

White is happy to gain the a-file.

22...Nc4 23 Bxc4 Rxc4 24 fxg6 Bxg5

Or 24...hxg6 25 Bxf6 Rxf6 26 Qg5 and White wins.

25 gxh7+ Kxh7 26 hxg5 Bc8 27 Rxf8 Qxf8 28 Rf1 Qg7 29 Rf6 Qa7+ 30 Kh2 Qd4?

This is suicide, but Black's position was hopeless anyway.

31 Qe2 1-0

The next game features the main line 9 a4, which is quite logical and may give White an edge, even though I have not found clear evidence of this. In practical games White has a good score with 9 a4, which underlines that Black needs to be especially attentive in the 8 Bb5+ line, or he will leave the opening with inferior chances.

Game 32

□ **Doroshkievich** ■ **Sherbakov**

St Petersburg 2000

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+ Nfd7 9 a4

This is regarded as the main line. I like Black's concept in this game, leading to good fighting chess with a nice finish.

9...0-0

a) 9...Na6 10 Nf3 Nb4 11 0-0 a6?! (I do not have much faith in this; instead 11...0-0 would return to the game) 12 Bxd7+! Bxd7 13 f5! (this is really bad news for Black) 13...0-0 14 Bg5 f6 15 Bf4 gxf5? (after this White won in convincing style; 15...Qe7 is better, but the position is bad) 16 Bxd6 Bxa4 17 Rxa4 Qxd6 18 Nh4! fxe4 19 Nf5 Qd7 20 Nxe4 Kh8 (if 20...b6 21 Ra3 and Rg3/Rh3 wins) 21 Nxc5 1-0 Kasparov-Nunn, Lucerne Olympiad 1982.

b) 9...Qh4+ is an interesting system, and definitely one to try: 10 g3 Qd8!? (or 10...Qe7 11 Nf3 0-0 12 0-0 Na6 13 Re1 Nb4 14 Bf1 Re8 15 Nb5 Nf6 16 e5 Nfxd5 17 Nxd6 Rd8 18 Bd2 with a slight edge for White in Lautier-Abergei, France 2004, but of course Black might improve on this) 11 Nf3 0-0 12 0-0 a6 13 Bd3 (if 13 Be2 Re8) 13...Nf6 14 Re1 Bg4 15 Be2 Nfd7 (I do not fully understand the reason for this move; instead 15...Re8 is more natural here, when 16 e5 dxe5 17 Nxe5 Bxe2 18 Rxe2 Nbd7 does not look worse for Black) 16 Nd2 (16 h3! Bxf3 17 Bxf3 was better; probably White did not spot this computer idea 16...Bxh3? 17 Ng5 and wins) 16...Bxe2 17 Rxe2 Re8 18 Nc4 Nb6 19 Na3 Bd4+ 20 Kh1 N8d7 with good play for Black in Palo-De Firmian, Copenhagen 2001.

10 Nf3 Na6

If 10...a6?! (10...Nf6!? 11 0-0 Bg4 makes more sense) 11 Be2! Nf6?! (better 11...Re8!? 12 0-0 Nf8 though Black cannot be fully satisfied with this position) 12 0-0 Qc7 (12...Bg4 13 e5! Nh5 14 Ng5! would also favour White) 13 e5 Ne8 14 e6! fxe6 15 Bc4 Qe7 16 dxe6 Nc7 17 f5! and White was already winning in Kasparov-Kuijpers, Dortmund 1980.

11 0-0 Nb4

11...Nc7 12 Bxd7 Bxd7 13 f5 intending 14 Bg5 is another difficult line.

12 Re1

After 12 h3 a6 13 Bc4 f5! 14 Ng5 Nb6 15 Bb3 a5 16 Be3 fxe4 17 Kh1 Nd3 White was already in difficulties in Bareev-Topalov, Dortmund (match) 2002. The game continued 18 Qd2 Re8 19 Rab1 Bf5 20 g4 h6! 21 gxf5 hxg5 22 fxg5 gxf5 23 Rxf5?! (better 23 Qe2 Qd7 24 Qh5 with an unclear position) 23...Qd7 24 Rbf1 Re5! 25 Rf7 Qxh3+ 26 Qh2 (not 26 Kg1? Rxc5+! 27 Bxc5 Bd4+ and wins) 26...Qxh2+ 27 Kxh2 Rf8 28 Rxf8+ Bxf8 29 Rf6 c4 30 Bd1 Nd7 31 Rg6+ Kh7 32 Re6 N7c5 33 Rf6 Kg8 34 Bh5 Be7 35 Rh6 Kf8 36 Rh8+ Kg7 37 Re8 Bxc5 38 Rxe5 Bxe3 39 Re7+ Kf6 40 Rf7+ Kg5 41 Bd1 Bd4 42 Kg2 Nxb2 43 Nb5 Be5 44 Bc2 Nbd3 45 Kf1 Nb4 46 Bb1 Nxd5 0-1. A fantastic effort which I saw live as a helper of the Topalov team.

12...a6 13 Bf1 Re8

13...Nf6!? is another possibility, when 14 h3 b6 is similar to the game. Instead 14 f5?! Ng4 15 Bf4 Re8 16 Qd2 b6 17 h3 Ne5 18 Nxe5 Bxe5 gave Black a good position in Tadic-Drazic, Belgrade 2004.

14 h3 b6!? (Diagram 14)

This plan is very unusual for the Modern Benoni. However, as Black cannot easily achieve ...b6-b5 with his knight on b4, instead he aims at preventing e4-e5.

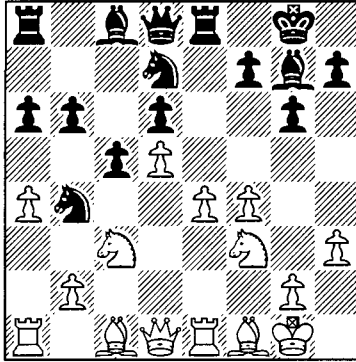


Diagram 14

The battle revolves around e4-e5

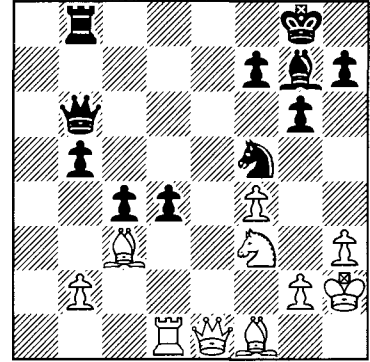


Diagram 15

The black pawn armada advances



TIP: Often the a8-rook can come into play with the manoeuvre ...Ra7-e7, which makes a lot of sense if Black cannot get in the ...b5 push.

15 Bc4

An earlier game saw 15 Kh1 Nf6 16 Bc4 Bb7 17 Bd2 Rc8 18 Qb3 Rc7 19 Rad1 Qa8 20 Bc1 Rd7 with unclear play in Biriukov-Sherbakov, St Petersburg 1999.

15...Bb7 16 Qb3 Nf6 17 Bd2 Rb8

A possible improvement is 17...Rc8 with the idea of ...Rc7 as in the previous note. The forced line seems fine for Black: 18 e5 dxe5 19 d6 Bxf3! (not 19...Qxd6? 20 fxe5 Rxe5 21 Rxe5 Bxf3 22 Bxf7+ Kh8 23 Qe6! and White comes out on top) 20 Bxf7+ Kh8 21 fxe5 Bc6 22 Bxe8 Nxe8 with good play for Black. It is hard to see what White will do about ...Nd3. If 23 Re3 Nxd6! 24 exd6 Bd4 and Black is close to winning.

18 Rad1 Nxe4!?

Black has prepared this. It is not correct, but having started down the path...

19 Rxe4 Rxe4 20 Nxe4 b5 21 axb5 axb5 22 Bf1 Bxd5 23 Qe3 Nc2 24 Qd3 Nd4 25 Bc3

25 Nxd4!? Bxd4+ 26 Be3 Qe7 27 Bxd4 Bxe4 28 Bf6! Qxf6 29 Qxe4 Qxb2 30 Rxd6 c4 31 f5 would clearly favour White.

25...c4 26 Qe3

Stronger was 26 Qd2! Bxe4 27 Nxd4 and Black does not have enough for the piece.

26...Nf5 27 Qe1 Qb6+ 28 Kh2 Bxe4 29 Qxe4 d5 30 Qe1

30 Rxd5!? Ne3 31 Be2 Bxc3 32 bxc3 Nxd5 33 Qxd5 Qe3 34 Qd6 Re8 35 Nd4 b4 36 Bxc4 bxc3 with unclear play is better.

30...d4 (Diagram 15) 31 Bd2 d3 32 Bc3 Bxc3 33 Qxc3 Qf2 34 Qe5 Rc8 35 Ng5 Qg3+ 36 Kg1 Qe3+ 37 Qxe3 Nxe3 38 Rd2 b4 39 Bxd3

Returning the piece as otherwise the black pawns are very dangerous.

39...cxd3 40 Rxd3 Rc1+ 41 Kf2 Nd1+ 42 Kf3 Nxb2 43 Rd8+ Kg7 44 Rd7 b3 45 Rxf7+ Kg8 46 Rb7 Nc4 47 Ne4?

Instead 47 Rb8+ Kg7 48 Rb7+ Kf8 49 Nxb7+ Ke8 50 Nf6+ Kd8 51 Ke2! b2 (51...Rc3 52 Rb8+ Kc7 53 Nd5+) 52 Kd3 b1Q 53 Rxb1 Rxb1 54 Kxc4 draws.

47...b2 48 Rd7 Ne5+!

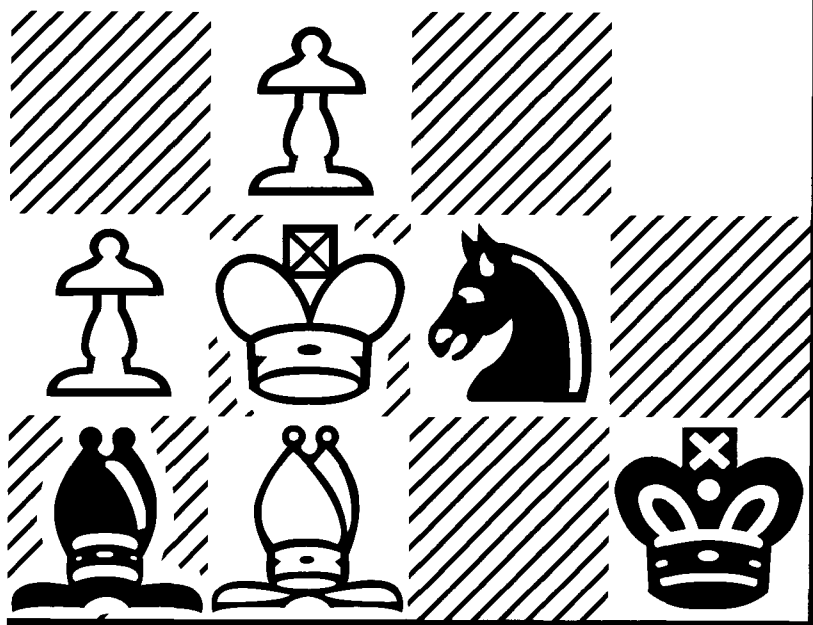
Not 48...b1Q? 49 Nf6+ with a draw.

49 fxe5 Rf1+ 0-1

Chapter Six

The Modern Variation: e2-e4, Nf3 and h2-h3

- Introduction
- 7 Nf3 a6 8 h3 b5
- 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 h3 0-0 9 Bd3
- The Main Line: 9...b5 10 Nxb5 Re8



Introduction

In this chapter we shall examine the variations where White plays h2-h3 to prevent ...Bg4 and plays Nf3 without f4. In this system d3 is the natural square for the f1-bishop, since if it is developed on e2 there would be a quick attack on e4.

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 h3 (Diagram 1)

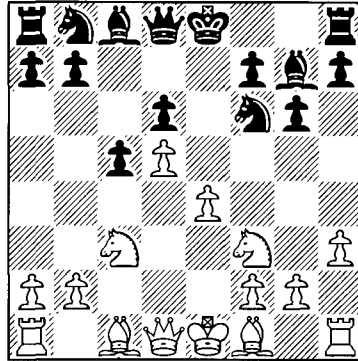


Diagram 1
The h3, Nf3, Bd3 system

Why would White Play like this?

It is a very natural set-up which aims at protecting e4 and preventing ...Bg4 at the same time. The bishop can go to d3 without worries, as there is no longer any pin with ...Bg4. White will then play Bf4 and Re1, trying to push e4-e5 supported by pieces rather than the f-pawn.

Should Black Worry about this?

I think so. This system is more positional than the aggressive 7 f4 and 8 Bb5+ attack, but it is still possible for Black to find his position spoilt in a bad way very quickly. Therefore it is necessary for Black to play vigilantly, probably with 9...b5!, or else the weird-looking 9...Nh5!?, playing against White's Bf4 and e4-e5 plan.

Theoretical?

This depends completely on how you play the system. The more aggressively you play (...b7-b5), the more you need to know what you are doing. I would recommend that Black players study carefully the lines given here as a very good starting point for playing over the board.

7 Nf3 a6 8 h3 b5

This is a sideline which is nevertheless quite often seen. The line is a close relative of the traditional h2-h3, Bd3 system. In fact, if Black played 8...Bg7 he would transpose to the main variation. But we do not want to: 8...b5 is the whole point of 7...a6!

Statistics

Black has a decent score of 44% in 82 games with 7...a6 8 h3 b5, so this is definitely a playable alternative to the main line. On the other hand, it is no secret weapon that will disarm White.

Game 33

□ Aleksandrov ■ Sherbakov

Calcutta 2002

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3

7 h3 is certainly a move order White could consider, and then 7...Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 Bd3 transposes to the main lines. Of course, if the position has arisen via 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 White will not have this possibility.

7...a6!? 8 h3

Other eighth moves are seen in the next chapter. 8 Bf4 is seen in Game 39, and Black hopes for 8 a4 Bg4 9 Qb3?! Bxf3 10 Qxb7 as in Game 41.

8...b5

Black is happy that this is now a possibility.

9 Bd3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bf4

11 a3 Nbd7 12 Bf4 (if 12 Bc2 Re8 13 Re1 Qb6 14 Be3 a5 15 Nd2 Ba6! gives Black good play, especially after 16 b4 Nh5 17 Ne2 axb4 18 axb4 Bxa1 19 Qxa1 Qc7 and White did not have enough for the exchange in Burnett-De Firmian, Seattle 2003; 17 Ndb1 Qc7 also favours Black) 12...Qe7 (12...c4!? is very sharp: 13 Bxd6 cxd3 14 Bxf8 Qxf8 15 Qxd3 Bb7 16 Rae1 Rd8 17 Nd2 Nb6 was very unbalanced, but maybe a little better for White in Rustemov-Suba, Villa de Albox 2002) 13 Re1 Nh5 (or 13...Bb7!? 14 Qd2 Rfe8 15 Rad1 Qf8 16 Bc2 Nb6 17 b3 Nfd7 with even chances in Rustemov-Marin, Mondariz 2002) 14 Bg5 Bf6 15 Bh6 Re8 16 Qd2 Bg7 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 g4?! was played in Paschall-De Firmian, Seattle 2003, and now 18...Qf6! would have secured Black the advantage.

11...Re8 12 Re1

After 12 a3 Qb6 13 Qd2 Nbd7 14 Rfe1 Bb7 15 Rad1 Rac8 16 Bh6 Bh8 17 Qf4 Ne5 18 Nxe5 Rxe5 19 Qf3 Ree8 White had perhaps slightly better chances in Christiansen-De Firmian, Seattle (blitz playoff) 2002. Instead 12...b4!? is certainly worth a try – why not nick the e-pawn?

12...Ra7 (Diagram 2)

TIP: As mentioned before in the book, this is the natural way to bring the rook into the game.



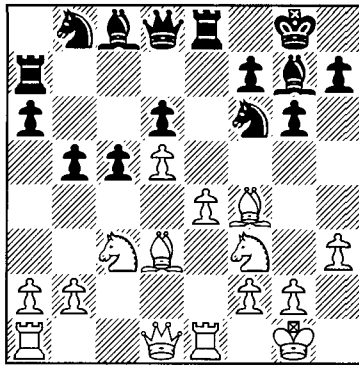


Diagram 2

A useful way to develop the rook

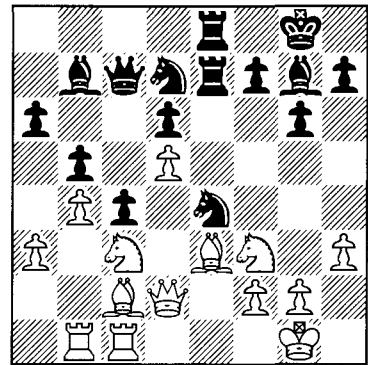


Diagram 3

The sacrifice is sound and strong

a) 12...b4? 13 Na4 Bd7 14 a3! gave White a great advantage in Dreev-Milov, Biel 1995.

b) 12...Bb7!? is an uncommon strategy, but was employed by a great Modern Benoni specialist. After 13 Rc1 c4 14 Bb1 Qb6 15 b3 cxb3 16 axb3 Nbd7 17 b4 Rac8 18 Be3 Qd8 19 Bd4 Nb6 20 Nd2 Nfd7 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Nb3 Nc4 23 Qd4+ Qf6 24 Qxf6+ Kxf6 chances were more or less even in Levin-Emms, Ghent 2002.

13 a3 Rae7 14 Qd2 Qb6 15 b4!?

White has also tried:

a) 15 Re2 Nbd7 16 Rae1 Nh5 17 Be3 Bd4! (a surprising move, but sometimes this resource is very important) 18 Bc2 Bxe3 19 Rxe3 Ne5 20 Nxe5 Rxe5 ½-½ Piket-Kamsky, Amsterdam 1996. Instead 18...Ne5!? 19 Nxd4 Nc4 20 Qd1 Nxb2 21 Qc1 cxd4 22 Qxb2 dxe3 23 Rxe3 should be slightly better for White according to Piket. However, I am not sure that this is correct. Why is Black worse here? After 23...Nf4 24 Rf3 g5! (with the idea of ...h6 and ...Ng6-e5) 25 Ne2 Nxe2+ 26 Rxe2 Re5 looks fine for Black.

b) 15 Bg5 Nbd7 16 Qf4 Nh5 led to a draw by repetition after 17 Qd2 Nhf6 18 Qf4 Nh5 19 Qd2 ½-½ Mitenkov-Sherbakov, Moscow 1999. Note that 17 Qh4? does not work because of the surprising 17...Re5!! 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 Be2 h6 20 Be7 (not 20 Be3?? Bf6 and Black wins) 20...Qc7 21 Bxh5 (21 f4?! Nxf4 is not right either) 21...gxh5 22 Bf6 Ng6 23 Qxh5 Bxf6 24 Qxh6 Qe7 and White is much worse (Sherbakov).

15...Nbd7 16 Rac1 Bb7

16...c4?! 17 Be3 Qb7 18 Bc2 Nf8 19 Nd4 is better for White. In Foisor-Pigusov, Moscow 1987, Black now became a little desperate, playing 19...Nxe4?! 20 Bxe4 Rxe4 21 Nxe4 Rxe4 22 Ne2 with a clear edge for White.

17 Be3

17 Bh2?! puts the bishop out of the game. After 17...c4 18 Bc2 Ne5 19

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

Nxe5 (not 19 Nd4? Nd3!) 19...dxe5 20 Qe3 Qxe3 21 fxe3 Rb8 22 a4 Bc8 23 axb5 axb5 24 Ra1 Ne8 25 Ra5 Reb7 26 Bg3 f6 27 Rb1 Bf8 28 Be1 Be7 29 Nd1 Bd8 30 Ra3 Bb6 Black had the better play in Gelfand-Topalov, Monaco (blindfold) 2001.

17...Qd8 18 Bg5 Qb6 19 Be3 Qd8 20 Rb1 Qc7 21 Rec1 c4 22 Bc2 Nxe4! (Diagram 3)

This time the sacrifice secures Black the advantage, since White cannot easily organise his pieces to defend the d-pawn.

23 Nxe4 Rxe4 24 Bxe4 Rxe4 25 Bh6 Bxh6 26 Qxh6 Nf6

If 26...f6!? 27 Re1 Bxd5 28 Rxe4 Bxe4 29 Re1 f5 30 Qh4 c3 31 Qe7 Bxf3 32 Qe6+ with a draw (Kapengut).

27 a4 Bxd5 28 axb5 axb5 29 Rd1 c3!

Passed pawns must be pushed.

30 Rbc1 Rxb4 31 Nd4 Be4?!

31...Ne4 32 Nc2! Qc5 33 Rxd5! Qxf2+ 34 Kh2 also leads to a draw. Instead 31...Be6! looked strong: after 32 Qe3?! Nd5! 33 Qd3 Qc5 White is not doing very well, so 32 Nxe6 fxe6 33 Qe3 was necessary, but White remains worse.

32 Qh4 Kg7 33 Nf5+!

Forced, but good.

33...gxf5 34 Qg5+ Kf8 35 Qxf6 c2

Black should count himself lucky that he can still achieve a draw.

36 Rxd6 Ke8 37 Qe5+ Kf8 38 Qh8+ Ke7 39 Qe5+ Kf8 40 Kh2!?

This does not really change anything.

40...Rb1 41 Qh8+ Ke7 42 Qf6+ Ke8 43 Qe5+ Kf8 44 Rxc2 Bxc2 ½-½

7 Nf3 Bg7 8 h3 0-0 9 Bd3

The young chess players who started playing only recently can identify the Modern Benoni line h2-h3, Bd3 because of its popularity. However, it was not always so popular. It is the positional players approach to the Modern Benoni these days. My evaluation of this variation is that Black is under slight pressure, but should be able to keep the balance.

Statistics

White has a good score in all variations. After 9...b5 he scores 60% in 888 games; 9...a6 gives White 61% in 525 games; 9...Re8 65% in 567 games; 9...Na6 67% in 214 games; 9...Nbd7 67% in 46 games; 9...Nh5!? 69% in 44 games; while 9...Bd7 gives White a huge score of 70% in 61 games, and the slow 9...b6 even more with 73% in 71 games.

However, statistics are one thing, another is the actual position on the board. Analysing the lines I am in no way in despair over Black's chances and would not mind defending the black position.

Game 34

□ Kolev ■ Suba

Mallorca 2000

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 c4 c5 4 d5 d6 5 Nc3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3
0-0 9 Bd3 (Diagram 4)

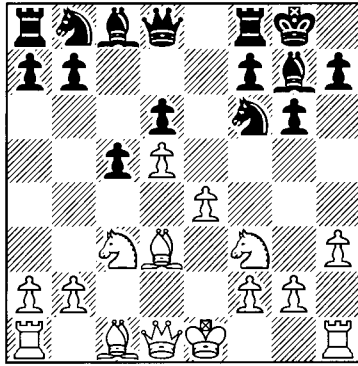


Diagram 4

The main line of the system

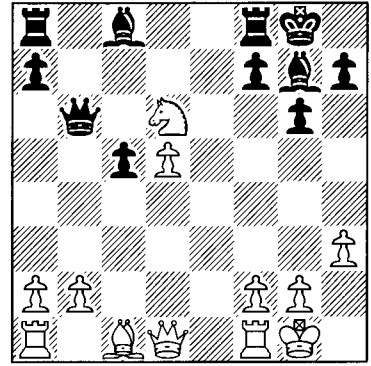


Diagram 5

Black has little trouble equalising

This is the main position in this system. The test of time has shown that Black has chances of equality in more than one way. We looked briefly at 9...b6 on page 59 in the introduction. Here we will spend a lot of time considering 9...b5!, which is the main move because otherwise Black will have problems facing 0-0, Bf4, Re1 and e4-e5.

9...b5!

The best way to meet White's loss of time with h2-h3; Black exploits the fact that the white king is still in the centre. However, the alternatives cannot easily be dismissed:

a) 9...Nh5!? is a recommendation from John Watson and clearly playable, even if it looks very strange. After 10 0-0 Nd7 11 Bg5 Bf6 12 Be3 Re8 13 Qd2 (after 13 Nd2 Bd4! 14 Re1 Bxe3 15 Rxe3 Ne5 16 Bf1 Nf4 was good for Black in I.Sokolov-Wedberg, Malmö 2001) 13...Ne5 (or 13...a6 14 a4 Ne5 15 Be2! Nxf3+ 16 Bxf3 Ng7 17 Rfe1 Bd7 18 Bf4 Be5 19 Bxe5 Rxe5 20 Bd1 with a slight pull for White in Akobian-Casella, Agoura Hills 2004, though I do not see why Black should not be able to play this kind of position) 14 Nxe5?! (better 14 Be2 again) 14...Bxe5 15 f4 (15 g4? Qh4! gives Black a very strong attack, e.g. 16 gxh5? Bh2+! wins; probably the only move is the humble 16 f3 with a clear superiority for Black) 15...Bxc3 16 Qxc3 Ng3 forced White into a dubious exchange sacrifice in Shulman-Langer, Stillwater 2002.

b) 9...Re8 10 0-0 c4 11 Be2 b5 is another way to play, but 12 a3! has scored well for White, e.g. 12...Na6 13 Be3 Bd7 14 Re1 Qc7 15 Bd4 and White is better; though Black need not lose in the following ridiculous

way: 15...Nh5 16 Qd2 Nc5 17 g4 Nf6 18 Qf4 and White won in Miles-Muhammad, Chicago 1990.

c) 9...a6!? is better than its reputation and probably playable, though I think White is generally for preference in these positions. Here is a recent example of how bad things can go for Black: 10 a4 Re8 11 0-0 Nbd7 12 Bf4 Qc7 13 Re1 Nh5 14 Bh2 Rb8 15 Be2 Nhf6 16 Nd2 Bf8 17 Kh1 Nb6 18 f4 Nfd7 19 Bf1 Bg7 20 Nf3 f6 21 Qd2 Qd8 22 Rad1 Na8 23 e5 fxe5 24 Ne4 exf4 25 Nxd6 Rxe1 26 Rxe1 Nf6 27 Bxf4 Bd7 28 Ng5 Nb6 29 a5 Nbx5 30 Bc4 Be6 31 Re5 Qxd6 32 Rxd5 1-0 Bacrot-Nazar, Evry 2004.

d) 9...Na6 10 0-0 Nc7 is rather too simplistic. After 11 Re1 Rb8 12 a4 a6 13 Bf1 b5 (or 13...Re8 14 Bf4 b5 15 e5) 14 e5 dxe5 15 Nxe5 Bb7 16 d6 White is surely better, e.g. 16...Ncd5 17 axb5 Nxc3 18 bxc3 axb5 19 Bg5 h6 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Bxb5 Bxg2 22 Kxg2 Rxb5 23 Qd5 Bxe5 24 Rxe5 with a clear advantage in Psakhis-Simacek, Pardubice 2003.

10 Bxb5

10 Nxb5 is the main move and is considered in the remaining games of this chapter.

10 Bxb5 leads to forced lines, which need to be known, but are not really dangerous for Black. There are a lot of practical examples of this drawish line. I chose to show the current game because it is relatively new and fairly typical, as well as played by a Benoni expert.

10...Nxe4 11 Nxe4 Qa5+ 12 Nfd2 Qxb5 13 Nxd6 Qa6 14 N2c4 Nd7 15 0-0 Nb6 16 Nxb6 Qxb6! (Diagram 5)

The simplest way to equalise is to keep the pressure on b2.

17 Nxc8 Raxc8 18 Rb1 Rfd8 19 Bf4

Or 19 Bg5 Rd7 20 Qg4 Qb7 21 Rfd1 h5 22 Qc4 (Black has no troubles after 22 Qf3 either, e.g. 22...Bd4 23 b4 Qxd5 24 Qxd5 Rxd5 25 Be3 Rcd8 26 bxc5 Bxe3 27 Rxd5 Rxd5 28 fxe3 Rxc5 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ Ibragimov-De Firmian, Reykjavik 1994) 22...Bd4 23 Be3 Qxd5 24 Qxd5 Rxd5 25 Rd2 a5! was soon drawn in Karpov-J.Polgar, Budapest (rapid) 1998.

19...Qb7 20 d6 Bf8 21 Qd3

Or 21 Qd2 Bxd6 22 Bxd6 Rc6 23 Rfd1 Qa6 24 Qg5 Rxd6 25 Rxd6 Rxd6 26 Qxc5 Qxa2 with a level position, Karpov-Topalov, Las Palmas 1996.

21...Bxd6 22 Bxd6 Rc6

Black will now regain the pawn, when his active play compensates for his slightly worse pawn structure. Nevertheless, White gives winning an honest try.

23 Rfd1!? Rcx6 24 Qxd6 Rxd6 25 Rxd6 Kg7 26 Rd2 Qa6 27 a3 Qc4 28 Re1 h5 29 Rde2 h4 30 Re4 Qb3 31 Rxh4 Qxb2 32 Rc4 Qxa3 33 Rec1 a5 34 Rxc5 a4 35 R5c3 Qb2 36 R3c2 Qb3 37 Re2 Qa3 38 Ree1 Qb2 39 Rb1 Qd2 40 Ra1 Qc3 41 Red1 Qc2 42 Rf1 Qb3 43 f4 Qb4 44 Kh2 Qd4 45 Ra2 Qc4 46 Rff2 Qb3 47 Ra1 Qe3 48 Rf3 Qd4 49 Ra2 Qc4 50 Rff2 Qc1 51 g3 Qe1 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

Very convincing play by Suba.

In the next game we shall discuss a line which has been declared dead many times, but still has the indecency to break out of the tomb. I cannot see that a well-prepared Black player should not be able to use this line. Except that, as in so many forced tactical lines, he needs to be happy with a draw if White does not try to win.

Game 35

□ **Golod** ■ **G.Gurevich**

Israeli Team Championship 2004

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 h3 Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 Bd3 b5! 10 Nxb5 Nxe4!?

The main line 10...Re8 is considered in the next two games.

11 Bxe4 Re8 12 Ng5!?

GM Lev Albur't's move that for a while sent this line into the dark. The alternative 12 Nd2 would transpose to Game 37.

12...h6!

Probably best. Already statistics are out the window, as this has rarely been played.

13 Ne6! (Diagram 6)

This is Albur't's discovery and the point of White's play. Instead 13 Qa4 hxe4 14 Nxd6 Re5! 15 Nxc8 f5 16 f3 fxe4 17 fxe4 Qxc8 18 0-0 Nd7 is a real computer line and Black is close to winning.

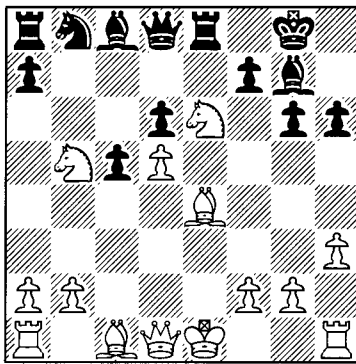


Diagram 6

The knight is extra, remember

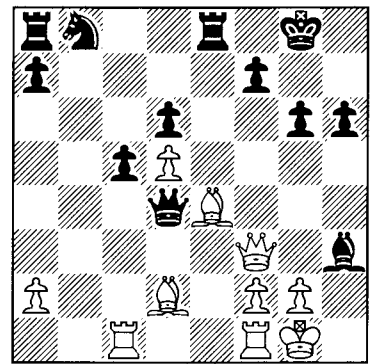


Diagram 7

An effective desperado

13...Qa5+

The only move. If 13...Bxe6? 14 dxe6 Rxe6 15 0-0! Rxe4 16 Qd5 Rb4 17 Nxd6 and White has won material, and 13...fxe6? 14 0-0! e5 15 Bxg6 is equally hopeless.

14 Nc3 Bxc3+ 15 bxc3 Qxc3+ 16 Bd2 Qc4

After 16...Qe5 17 0-0 Bxe6 18 dxe6 Qxe4 19 exf7+ Kxf7 20 Re1 Qd5 21 Qa4 Nc6 22 Qf4+ Kg8 23 Qxh6 was successful in Browne-Frias Pablaza, Philadelphia 1992. White had another strong option in 21 Rxe8 Kxe8 22 Bxh6 and either Black is under great attack, or he loses the endgame.

17 Qf3!

This is the critical move. After 17 Qe2?! Qxe2+ 18 Kxe2 Na6! (18...fxe6? 19 dxe6 Rxe6 20 Kf3 Rxe4 21 Kxe4 Bb7+ 22 Kd3 Nd7 23 f3 gives White good chances of success) 19 Rhe1 (or 19 Bxh6 fxe6 20 Bxg6 Re7) fxe6 20 dxe6 Rb8 Black was not worse in Eslon-R.Vazquez, Zaragoza 1991.

17...Bxe6 18 Rc1 Qd4

This is the main move, but it is not the only one. 18...Bg4?! 19 Rxc4 Bxf3 20 gxf3 f5 21 Rg1 Kh7 22 Bf4 left White with a clear advantage in Poluljahov-Glyanets, Moscow 1991. But what about 18...Qa4!? protecting e8? After 19 0-0 Bg4 20 Qxg4 Rxe4 (not 20...Qxe4?? 21 Rfe1! 1-0 Zysk-Gruenenwald, German Bundesliga 1995) the position is not that clear. White regains his pawn, but Black gets in moves like ...Nd7 and ...Rae8 and enjoys great freedom. 21 Qg3 Qxa2 22 Bxh6 Qxd5 looks critical, but after 23 Rfd1 Qe5 24 Qxe5 Rxe5 25 Rxd6 Re8 26 Rxc5 a5 I do not feel confident enough to declare that White has an edge in the endgame.

19 0-0

This is given an exclamation mark by Golod, which is probably correct. Instead 19 Bc3!? Bg4 20 hxg4 Qxe4+ was played in Valenzuela Fuentealba-Egger, Chilean Championship 1998, when 21 Kd2! is very good for White, since 21...Qxf3 22 gxf3 Kh7 23 f4! threatens 24 Rxh6+! and mates. 20...Qc4 is no improvement after 21 Rxh6! Rxe4+ 22 Kd2 Qxa2+ (or 22...Qxd5+ 23 Qd3 Qg5+ 24 Kc2) 23 Rc2 Qxd5+ 24 Kc1 Qg5+ 25 Kb1 Qxh6 26 Qxe4 Nc6 27 Qxc6 Rb8+ 28 Rb2 and White wins. However, there's no need to open the h-file for White. Instead 19...Qc4! looks stronger, when 20 Bd2 Qd4 repeats, while if 20 Kd2?! f5! 21 dxe6 Qxe4 and Black surely must be better.

19...Bxh3! (Diagram 7)

A new move. Instead Golod-Kozakov, Bucharest 1992, had continued 19...Bf5 20 Bc3 Bxe4 21 Qf4 Qxd5 22 Qxh6 f6 23 Bxf6 Qb7 24 f3 Qh7 25 Qxh7+ Kxh7 26 fxe4 Rxe4 (26...Nd7! would have been OK – Golod) 27 Rb1 Rb4 28 Rbd1 Nd7 29 Bc3 Rc4 30 Rf7+ Kg8 31 Rg7+ Kh8 32 Ba1 and White won.

20 Bc3! Bxg2!

The point! 20...Qxe4? 21 Rfe1 is bad news.

21 Qf4 Qxe4 22 Rfe1 Nd7

Not 22...Qxe1+? 23 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 24 Bxe1 Bxd5 25 Qxd6 and White wins.

23 Rxe4 Bxe4 24 Qxh6!

Or 24 Qxd6 Bf5 with unclear play (G.Gurevich).

24...f6 25 f3 Bf5 26 Kf2 Re7 27 Rh1 Rf8 28 Qh2!?

Black was now outside his preparation.

28...Ne5 29 Bxe5 fxe5 30 Qh8+ Kf7 31 Rh7+ Ke8 32 Rxe7+ Kxe7

Golod thinks Black has equalised here.

33 Qh4+ Ke8 34 Ke3 Bd7

34...Rf7!? 35 Qh8+ Rf8 36 Qg7 Rf7, keeping an eye on a7, would draw easily.

35 Qh6 Rf4 36 Qxg6+ Ke7 37 Qg5+ Ke8 38 Qg8+ Ke7 39 Qg6 Rb4?

After 39...a5!? 40 Qg5+ Ke8 41 Qg8+ Ke7 42 Qg6 a4 Black should not lose.

40 Qg5+ Ke8 41 Qf6 Rb6 42 f4! exf4+ 43 Kxf4

Now Black has real problems.

43...Ra6 44 Kg5 Bb5?

This loses. 44...Bc8 was necessary.

45 Qh8+! Kd7 46 Qb8 Bc4

Or 46...Be2 47 Kf6 Bf1 48 a4! and White wins because of zugzwang.

47 Qb7+ Kd8 48 Kf6 Rb6 49 Qxa7 Ra6 50 Qb8+ Kd7 51 Qb7+ Kd8 52 Ke6 Bxd5+ 53 Kxd5 Rxa2 54 Kc6! Ke8 55 Qd7+ Kf8 56 Qxd6+ Kg7 57 Qe7+ Kh8 58 Qf8+ 1-0

The Main Line: 9...b5 10 Nxb5 Re8

We move on to the main line in the next two games. In these Black plays the more subtle 10...Re8, intending to regain the pawn next move, either by ...Nxe4 or ...Nxd5.

Statistics

After 9...b5 10 Nxb5 Nxe4 Black has nightmare result of only 26% from 212 games, though as the previous game shows, things are not necessarily that simple. After 10...Re8 Black scores a nice 47% in 310 games. Then 11 0-0 is by far the most popular reply with 228 entries in my database. However, White's score is a meagre 52%, whereas 11 Nd2 gives White a blazing score of 63% from 39 games.

Game 36

□ Shulman ■ Filippov

Linares 1997

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Bd3 Bg7 8 h3 0-0 9 Nf3 b5 10 Nxb5 Re8

This is the hot move these days.

11 0-0 (Diagram 8)

TIP: Caution in the opening often means that you throw away your chances for an advantage, but retain your chances for failure!

11...Nxe4 12 Qa4

12 Re1 a6 13 Na3 Nf6 14 Rxe8+ Nxe8 and 12 Qb3 a6 13 Na3 Nd7 14 Nc4



Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

Rb8 15 Qc2 f5 are two more calm lines. Black has no particular problems here either.

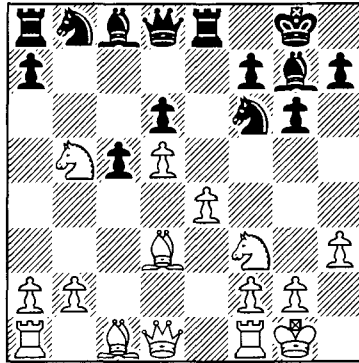


Diagram 8

Cautious play may not trouble Black

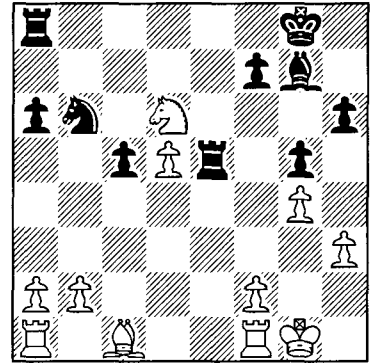


Diagram 9

Black should hold the endgame

12...a6 13 Bxe4

13 Re1 Nd7 14 Rxe4 Rxe4 15 Qxe4 Nf6 has also been played.

13...Bd7 14 Bd3 Qb6 15 Ng5 Bxb5

15...axb5!? 16 Qh4 (if 16 Qxa8 Na6) 16...h6 17 Ne4 Qd8!? should equalise safely as well: 18 Qxd8 (not 18 Qg3?! c4 19 Bc2 Bf5 20 Qxd6 Na6 21 Qf4 Nb4 22 Bb1 Nxd5 and Black was doing very well in Hegeler-Pajeken, Hamburg 1998) 18...Rxd8 19 Nxd6 c4 20 Be2 Na6 21 Bd2 Nc5 and Black had good play. Tallaksen-Womacka, Gausdal 2003, continued 22 Bb4 Na4 23 b3?! (after 23 a3 Black is only a little better) 23...Bxa1 (stronger was 23...Nc3! 24 Bxc3 Bxc3 25 bxc4 Bxa1 26 Rxa1 bxc4 27 Nxc4 Bb5 and the endgame seems rather dubious for White) 24 Rxa1 cxb3 25 axb3 Nb6 26 Rd1 Ra2 ½-½.

16 Bxb5 Qxb5 17 Qh4

If 17 Qf4!? Qd7 18 Ne4 Qe7! 19 Re1 Nd7 20 Bd2 Be5 and Black is fine.

17...h6 18 Ne4 g5 19 Qg4 Qd7!

If 19...Be5 20 Ng3! would cause Black serious problems.

20 Qxd7

After 20 Qf3?! f5 21 Ng3 f4 22 Nh5 Bd4! it is not nice to be White. Black will play ...Qf7 and ...Nd7-e5, which is not easy to meet.

20...Nxd7 21 Nxd6 Re5 22 g4!? Nb6 (Diagram 9) 23 Nf5

23 Be3!? is the best try for an advantage, but the simple 23...Rxd5 24 Nf5 Re8 should still hold the black position together.

23...Nxd5 24 Rd1

24 Be3!? Nxe3 25 fxe3 c4 26 Rac1 Ra5 is also OK for Black – Shulman, Kapengut.

24...Rae8 25 Kf1 Kh7 26 Bd2 Bf6 27 Rac1 Nf4 28 Bxf4 gxf4 29 f3 Re2
30 Re1 Rh2! 31 Rxe8 Rh1+ 32 Ke2 Rxc1 33 b3 Rc2+ 34 Kd3 Rf2

34...Rxa2 35 Rf8 Kg6 36 Rg8+ Kh7 37 Rf8 is also a draw.

35 h4 Rxf3+ 36 Ke4 Rh3!

36...Rf1?? 37 Rf8 f3 38 h5 f2 is a wrong plan, because of 39 Rxf7+ Kh8 40 Rxf6! and 41 Ne3 wins.

37 Kxf4 Bxh4 38 Nxb4 Rxh4 39 Kg3 Rh1 40 Ra8 ½-½

After 40...Kg6! 41 Rxa6+ Kg5 Black is not worse; nor after 42 Rc6 or 42 Rd6!? is White.

In the last game with 10 Nxb5 we see the great Topalov play the black pieces in the most aggressive way. I have great doubts about the reliability of this variation, but for one game it could be worth a gamble.

Game 37

□ Van Wely ■ Topalov

Wijk aan Zee 1998

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 d6 5 Nc3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 h3 Bg7

The interesting attempt to avoid this system by 7...a6 8 a4 Qe7!? was examined in Game 17. Topalov has no problem playing against the h3 line, however.

8 e4 0-0 9 Bd3 b5 10 Nxb5 Re8 11 Nd2

This is the main attack on the black position.

11...Nxe4!?

This is the risky option – probably too risky. The main move is 11...Nxd5 which scores much better (50% as opposed to 36%) than the text. After 12 Nc4 Nb4 (Diagram 10) we have:

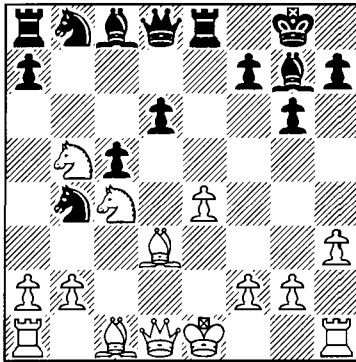


Diagram 10

The sound 11...Nxd5 option

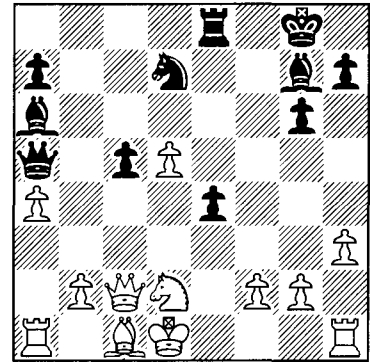


Diagram 11

Black attacks, but is it strong enough?

a) 13 Nbx d6 should not be completely dismissed: 13...Nxd3+ 14 Qxd3 Ba6
15 Bf4 Nc6 16 Qd5 Qf6 (16...Re6!? 17 0-0 Ne7 18 Qxc5 Bxc4 19 Qxc4 Rxd6

20 Bxd6 Qxd6 21 Rad1 Qf4 22 Rd7 might be a little better for White) 17 Bg5 Bxc4 18 Nxc4 Nb4 19 Qxa8 Nd3+ 20 Kd1 Nxb2+ 21 Ke2 Qe6 22 Qb7 Nxc4 with even chances in Barsov-Berelovich, Dieren 1998. Instead, the greedy 17 Nxe8!? Rxe8 18 Bd2 is interesting, though Black should get sufficient compensation after the paradoxical 18...Qe6! (18...Bxc4 19 Qxc4 Qxb2 20 Rd1 Bd4 21 0-0 gives White the advantage) 19 Qxe6 Rxe6, e.g. 20 Ne3 Ne5 21 Bc3 Nd3+ 22 Ke2 Nxb2+ 23 Kd2 Rxe4 24 Bxg7 Kxg7 25 Rhc1 Nd3 26 Rc3 Rd4. These lines are quite complex of course, and there is no reason why it should not be profitable to play material up either!

b) 13 Be2 Ba6 (13...Rxe4!? 14 Nxd6 Rxe2+ 15 Qxe2 Ba6 is not stupid either, e.g. 16 Bg5 Bxb5 17 Bxd8 Bxe2 18 Kxe2 N8c6 19 Bg5 Nd4+ 20 Kf1 Ndc2 21 Rd1 Nxa2 with some compensation in Lazarev-Cebalo, Cannes 1995; I would go for the main line, however) 14 Nbx6 Re6 15 0-0 (or 15 Bf4 Nd7 16 0-0 Ne5 17 Bxe5 Bxe5 18 a3 Rxd6 19 Nxd6 Qxd6 20 axb4 Qxd1 21 Bxd1 Bxf1 22 Kxf1 cxb4 23 Ra4 a5 24 b3 Rd8 25 Be2 Bc7 ½-½ Hillarp Persson-Gdanski, Gothenburg 1997) 15...N8c6 16 a3 Nc2! 17 Qxc2 Nd4 18 Qd3 Rxd6 19 Bf4 Nxe2+ 20 Qxe2 Rd4 21 Rac1 Qh4 22 Bg3 Qxe4 23 Qxe4 Rxe4 and White was under pressure in Cebalo-Rotstein, Portoroz 1997.

12 Bxe4

It should be noted that Black may have to defend this position if he opts for 10...Nxe4!?

12...Ba6 13 a4

13 Qb3 c4! 14 Qxc4 Qa5 leads to something that looks like a forced draw: 15 a4 Bxb5 16 Qxb5 Rxe4+ 17 Kd1 Qxb5 18 axb5 Rb4 19 Re1 Nd7 20 Re7 Nb6 21 Rax7 Rxa7 22 Rxa7 Bxb2 23 Rb7 Rxb5 24 Ne4 (or 24 Bxb2 Rxb2 25 Ne4 Rb4 26 Nxd6 Nxd5 with a draw, as 27 Rxf7 Rd4+ 28 Kc1 Nb6 forces the repetition 29 Rf6 Nd7 30 Re6 Nf8 31 Rf6 Nd7 etc.) 24...Rxd5+ 25 Kc2 Bxc1 26 Nf6+ Kg7 27 Nxd5 Nxd5 28 Kxc1 Nf4 29 Kd2 Nxc2 30 Rb4 h5 31 h4 Kf6 32 Ke2 Ke5 33 Kf3 ½-½ Barsov-Velicka, Cairo 2001.

13...Qa5!

The main move, and very aggressive. 13...f5? 14 0-0 fxe4 is bad for Black after 15 Nc4 (15 Re1!? looks strong too) 15...Bd4 (or 15...Be5 16 Re1 with a clear advantage to White) 16 Nxd6 Rf8 17 Bh6 Bxb2 (if 17...Rxf2 18 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 19 Kxf2 Qh4+ 20 Kg1 Qxh6 21 Qg4! wins) 18 Bxf8 Bxa1 19 Qxa1 Qxf8 20 Qe5 Bxb5 21 axb5 a5 22 Nxe4 1-0 Graf-Ghaem Maghami, Moscow 2004.

14 Nxd6 Nd7!

Not 14...Rd8? 15 Nxf7! Kxf7 16 d6 Kg8 17 Qf3 Re8 18 Kd1 and White is winning. 14...Re7? is also too slow. This is not the way to play when you have launched a sacrificial attack. 15 Qf3 Nd7 16 Kd1 Ne5 (or 16...f5 17 Nxf5 gxf5 18 Qxf5 and White won in Lazarev-Handke, Biel 1997) 17 Qc3 Qd8 18 Nb5 and White was a piece up in Siebrecht-Danner, Germany 2000.



TIP: When you are attacking you will not always have time to show tender care for your troops. 'Forward' is the word the sergeants shout before rushing into battle!

15 Qc2

15 Nxe8 Rxe8 16 Qc2 transposes, while after 15 g4 Rxe4! 16 Nxe4 Ne5 17 Ra3 Nd3+ 18 Rxd3 Bxd3 19 f3 f5 20 gxf5 gxf5 21 Ng5 c4! Black had a very dangerous attack in Kozul-Barlov, Kladovo 1989.

15...f5 16 Nxe8

White does not achieve much by delaying the capture, e.g. 16 Kd1 fxe4 17 N2c4 Qd8!? (17...Bxc4 18 Nxc4 Nd6 is also possible) 18 Nxe8 Qxe8 19 Ra3 Qf7 20 Nd2 Re8 21 Re3 Bd3 22 Rxd3 exd3 23 Qxd3 Ne5 24 Qb5 a6 25 Qe2 ½-½ Li Wenliang-Zhang Pengxiang, Gyula 2000.

16...Rxe8 17 Kd1 fxe4 (Diagram 11) 18 Ra3

This has scored worse than 18 Nxe4!? Qb4 (Marin thinks Black has compensation here, though it is very hard to determine if it is enough or not) 19 f3 (not 19 Re1? Qd4+ 20 Nd2 Rxe1+ 21 Kxe1 Bd3 22 Qc3 Qxd5 and White is suddenly in trouble) 19...Re5!? (Marin's idea; after 19...Qd4+ 20 Qd2 Bd3 21 Ra3 c4 22 Re1 White looks to consolidate) 20 Bd2 (20 Nc3 Qd4+ 21 Qd2 Bd3 22 Re1 Bh6! 23 f4 Bxf4 24 Qxf4 Be2+ 25 Kc2 Bd3+ 26 Kd1 Be2+ was a draw in Lokotar-Marin, Vosu 1989; not 23 Qxh6?? Bc4+ and Black mates by 24 Qd2 Bb3, or 24 Kc2 Qd3, or 24 Bd2 Rxe1+ 25 Kxe1 Qg1) 20...Rxd5 21 Kc1 Qb8 22 Ra3 and White was allegedly better in Lokotar-Maidla, Tallinn 1991. It is very hard to come to any conclusions in such positions. Probably at the end of the day Black should not be able to play like this, but for the one who desires to do so, there is no stopping him.

18...c4!? 19 Re3?!

White organises his rooks incorrectly. But after 19 Re1 Qxd5 20 Rxe4 Rd8! 21 Rae3 Nc5 Black still has a strong attack according to Van Wely.

19...Qxd5 20 Rxe4 Rf8!

Now White does not have Rf3.

21 f3 Nc5 22 Re7 Bf6

Not 22...Nd3 23 Rxg7+! Kxg7 24 Qc3+ Kg8 25 Kc2 and White is OK.

23 Rxa7 c3! 24 Rxa6 cxd2 25 Rxf6

If 25 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 26 Bxd2 Nxa6 27 Kc2 Rc8+ 28 Bc3 Nb4+ 29 Kb3 Bxc3 30 bxc3 Nd5 31 c4 Rb8+ 32 Ka3 Ne3 33 Rc1 Nxc2 and Black has real winning chances in the endgame.

25...dxc1Q+ 26 Kxc1 Rxf6 27 Rd1

Or 27 Kb1 Qf5! and Black wins one of the queenside pawns.

27...Qc6 28 Kb1 Nxa4 29 Qxc6 Rxc6 30 Rd8+?

30 Rd4 Nb6 31 b4 White gave some drawing chances, though Black has more than the small advantage indicated by Van Wely.

30...Kg7 31 Rd7+ Kh6 32 h4 Nc5 33 Rf7 Ne6 34 Ka2 Ra6+ 35 Kb1 Nd4 36 Rf4 Nf5 37 Re4 Rd6 38 Kc2 Ng3 39 Rg4 Nf1 40 Kc3 Ne3 41 Rg5 Nf5 42 Rg4 Kh5 43 b4 Ne3 44 Rd4 Rxd4 45 Kxd4 Nc2+ 46 Ke5

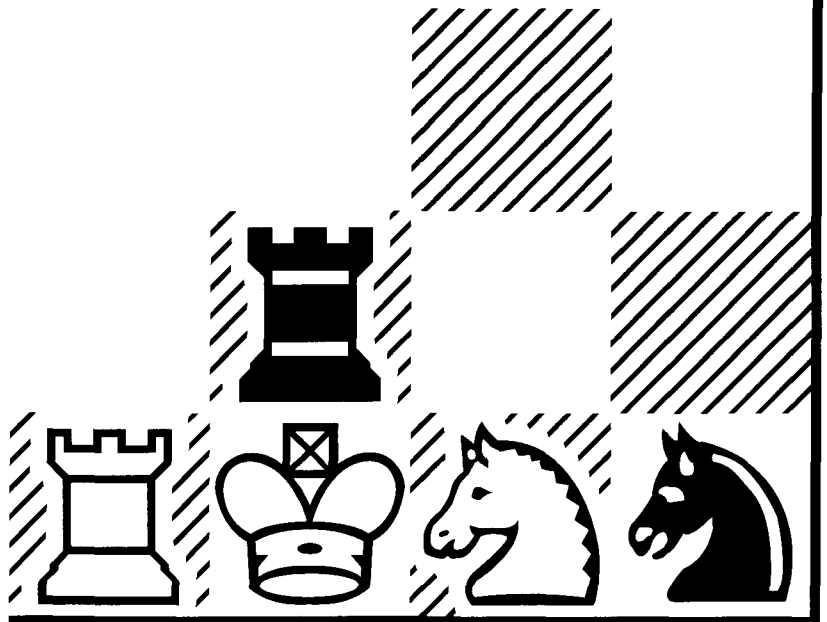
If 46 Kc5 Nxb4! still wins.

46...Nxb4 47 Kf6 Nd5+ 48 Kg7 Ne3 0-1

Chapter Seven

Classical Sidelines with Nf3 and e2-e4

- Introduction
- White Plays Bg5
- White Plays Bf4
- The Greedy Qb3 and Qxb7



Introduction

In this chapter we shall look at some more classical ways of playing the Modern Benoni, in which White simply develops his pieces with e2-e4, Nf3, Bg5 or Bf4, and Be2. We shall also look at positions where Black is allowed to play ...Bg4 and exchange his bishop.

White Plays Bg5

The combination of e2-e4 and Bg5 feels wrong and is seen in tournament practice more often than one might expect. White has a decent score with it, but it should not create serious headaches for Black. In the game below, we see once again the great trick shot ...b4-b3! from Black.

Statistics

White has a nice score of 60-40 over 722 games with 8 Bg5, but if Black replies as in the game, the score changes to 54% from 223 games, which just makes it a normal main line and nothing more.

Game 38

□ **Wegner** ■ **Klinger**

Lugano 1984

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bh4 a6! 10 Nd2 b5

The main line. If Black responds in this way he has generally good results.
11 Be2 0-0 12 Qc2 Nbd7 (Diagram 1)

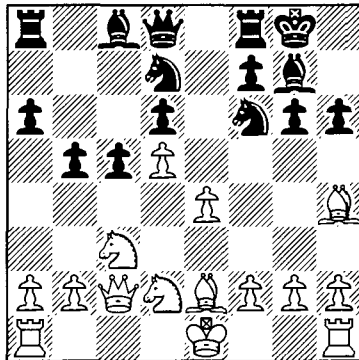


Diagram 1

This line is fairly safe for Black

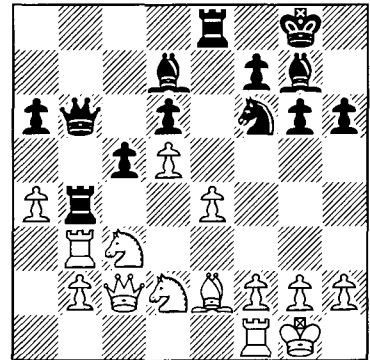


Diagram 2

Black has sufficient counterplay

13 a4

After 13 0-0 c4! 14 f4 (14 a4 Rb8 15 axb5 axb5 16 b4 cxb3 17 Qxb3 Nc5 18

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

Qb4 Re8 was good for Black in Sorin-Vera, Bayamo 1988) 14 f4 Re8 15 Rae1 Nc5 16 Kh1 Bb7 17 a4 Qb6 18 Bf2 Nfd7 offered equal chances in Genov-Papaioannou, Athens 2001.

13...b4 14 Nd1 Re8 15 0-0

15 Ne3 b3 16 Qb1 Qc7! 17 0-0 transposes to the 17 Ne3 note below.

15...b3! 16 Qb1!?

After 16 Qd3 (if 16 Qxb3 g5 17 Bg3 Nxe4 regains the pawn) 16...Rb8 17 Nc3 Ne5 18 Qb1 g5 19 Bg3 Ng6 20 Nc4 Nf4! 21 Re1 Rb4 22 Bf1 Ng4 Black had a great position in Babu-R.Antonio, Calcutta 1994, concluding 23 Qd1 Bd4 24 h3 Ne5 25 Ne3 Qf6 26 Ra3 h5 27 Rxb3? Rxb3 28 Qxb3 Nxb3+! 29 gxh3 Nf3+ 30 Kh1 Nxe1 31 Qd1 h4 32 e5 Qf3+ 0-1.

16...Qc7

Black should seriously consider 16...g5!? 17 Bg3 Nxd5 18 Bxd6 (if 18 exd5 Rxe2 19 Qd3 Re8 20 Nc4 Ne5 or 18 Nc4 Nb4 19 Nxd6 Nc2 20 Nxe8 Qxe8 21 Bc4 Nb6 22 Bxb3 Nxa1 23 Qxa1 Qxe4 and I prefer Black) 18...Qf6! (18...Ne5 19 Bxe5 Rxe5 20 exd5 Rxe2 21 Qd3 Re5 22 Ne3 was slightly better for White in Richardson-Kosten, British Championship 1983) 19 Bg3 Nf4 20 Bc4 Ne5! with a strong position for Black (Klinger).

17 Nc3

17 Ne3 Rb8 18 Bg3 Ne5 gives Black good play. Here we see true power play from his hand: 19 Ra3 Rb4 20 Rd1 g5 21 Rxb3 Rxa4 22 Qc2 Bd7 23 Ra3 Rxa3 24 bxa3 Ng6 25 Nec4 Nf4 26 Bxf4 gxf4 27 Bd3 Rb8 28 Nf3 Bg4 29 Rb1 Rb5 30 Ncd2 Rxb1+ 31 Qxb1 Nd7 32 Nc4? Bxf3 33 gxf3 Bd4 34 Qb3 Qd8! 35 Nxd6 Ne5 36 Nf5 Qg5+ 37 Kf1 Nxf3 38 Ke2 Qg2 39 Qb8+ Kh7 40 Qxf4 Qxf2+ 0-1 Murshed-Gavrikov, Tbilisi 1983.

17...Rb8 18 Ra3 Rb4! 19 Bxf6!? Nxf6 20 Rxb3 Qb6!?

Perhaps stronger was 20...Nxe4! 21 Ncxe4 Rxe4 22 Qxe4 Rxe4 23 Nxe4 Bf5 when the g7-bishop is really powerful, whereas the white rooks are not doing anything much.

21 Qc2 Bd7 (Diagram 2)

Black has enough play for his pawn according to Klinger.

22 Ra1

22 a5! was probably best. The key idea is 22...Qxa5 23 Ra3 and White regains the extra pawn, or something like that.

22...Rxb3 23 Nxb3 Rb8 24 Ra3 Ng4!? 25 Nd1 Ne5 26 Nd2 Qa5 27 b3?

Better was 27 h3! with an unclear position.

27...Rb4! 28 Bc4 Nxc4 29 Nxc4 Rxc4!

After this there is probably no defence. The bishops are too strong.

30 Qxc4 Qe1+ 31 Qf1 Qb4 32 Ra2 Qxb3 33 Rd2 Qxa4 34 Qd3 Qa1 35 h4 Bb5 36 Qf3 c4 37 Kh2 c3 38 Rc2 Ba4 39 Rxc3 Be5+! 40 g3 Bxd1 0-1

'Our' guy plays chess nearly as well as he plays poker, roulette and black-jack... brilliantly!

White Plays Bf4

In the next game we see White trying to punish his opponent for playing ...a6 and ...b5, and totally failing in the process. The clever 9...Be7! is definitely the way forward for Black. He can live with this awkward development because, in return, he has already achieved something on the queenside. In any case, White does not usually do very well in positions with both e2-e4 and Bf4, when the chances of a successful e4-e5 are as slim as in these games.

Theoretical?

Nope! Remember to 14...f5! in the first game and you are fine. In the second game, Black just needs to make sure to capture on f3 before the white knight moves away.

Statistics

After 7 Bf4 a6 8 e4 b5 9 Qe2 Be7!? the score is 50-50 in 51 games. This increases slightly with 10 Qc2 0-0, when White has a 54% score in 25 games. However, with the new move in this game, we might see a change in this trend.

Black is doing really well with 8 a4 Bg7 9 e4 Bg4 10 Be2 Bxf3 11 Bxf3 0-0 12 0-0 Qe7, pulling in 53% of the points from 225 games; whereas after 10...0-0 11 0-0 Re8 12 Nd2 (as played in Game 40) he is struggling at a mere 40% in 160 games. Therefore logic and statistics combine to recommend 10...Bxf3!

Game 39

□ Khenkin ■ Ward

French League 2003

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 c4 c5 4 d5 d6 5 Nc3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 Bf4 a6 8 e4 b5 9 Qe2

With the obvious intention of e4-e5. Basically White is trying to outsmart his opponent, but it is not going to be that easy!

9...Be7!? (Diagram 3)

9...Bg7 10 Bxd6 Qxd6 11 e5 Qe7 12 d6 Qe6 13 Ng5 or simply 10 e5 is really not what Black wants. The text looks clumsy, but it succeeds in negating White's e4-e5 threat (see the next note), which means the queen isn't well placed on e2 either.

10 Qc2

Having encouraged ...Be7 the white queen considers it job done and relocates to a better square. The consistent alternative 10 e5 dxe5 11 Bxe5 Nbd7 gives Black a sensational score.

a) 12 0-0-0 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Qd6 14 Nc6 Kf8 15 Nxe7 (15 g3 Bf5 16 Bg2 Re8 17 Rhe1 Bd8 18 Qd2 Kg7 gave Black a good game in H.Pedersen-Emms,

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Esbjerg 1996) 15...Qxe7 16 d6 Qxe2 17 Bxe2 Bb7 18 Bf3 Bxf3 19 gxf3 Kg7 with a good position for Black. Milovanovic-Hulak, Pula 1990, continued 20 Rhe1 Rhe8 21 Rxe8 Rxe8 22 a4 b4 23 Ne4 Nd7 24 Rd5 f5 25 Nd2 Re1+ 26 Kc2 Kf6 27 Nc4 Re2+ 28 Rd2 Rxd2+ 29 Kxd2 Ke6 30 Kd3 Nf6 31 Na5 Kxd6 32 Kc4 Nd7 33 Nb7+ Kc6 34 Nd8+ Kc7 35 Nf7 Nb6+ 36 Kxc5 Nxa4+ 37 Kxb4 Nxb2 38 Ng5 h6 39 Nf7 Nd3+ 40 Ka5 Kd7 41 Kxa6 Ke7 42 Nxb6 Kf6 43 Kb5 Kg7 44 Nxf5+ gxf5 45 Kc4 Ne5+ 46 Kd5 Nxf3 47 Ke6 Kg6 48 h3 Kg5 0-1. The ease with which Black won this game is very compelling.

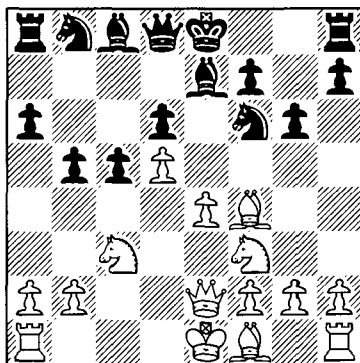


Diagram 3

What is the bishop doing on e7?

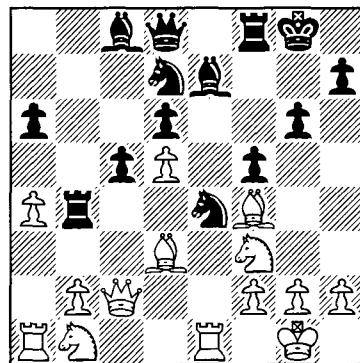


Diagram 4

Black plays very actively

b) 12 Rd1 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Qd6 14 a4 is the recommendation of my computer program as well, but has only been played once: 14...0-0 15 axb5 Re8 16 Nc4 Qb8 17 Ne3 axb5 18 Qxb5 Qe5 (18...Bd7!? 19 Qxb8 Raxb8 20 Rd2 Ng4! also gives Black excellent compensation for the pawn, e.g. 21 Be2 Nxe3 22 fxe3 Bh4+ 23 g3 Bg5 24 Nd1 Bxe3 25 Nxe3 Rxe3 26 Kf2 Reb3 27 Rb1 Bf5 28 Rc1 Rxb2 29 Rxb2 Rxb2 and White must now take care not to lose the endgame, unless it is already too late) 19 Be2 Ba6 20 Qb3 Bxe2 21 Nxe2 Rab8 and Black was not worse in an online game, Daps-Southbourne Chess, 2002.

10...0-0 11 a4 b4 12 Nb1

Also possible is 12 Nd1 Nh5 13 Bh6 Re8 14 Bd3 Bf8 15 Bg5 f6 16 Be3 f5!? (very provocative; 16...Ng7 first is more steady) 17 exf5 Nf4 18 fxg6 Nxc2+ 19 Kd2 Qf6 20 gxh7+ Kh8 21 Ne1 Nxe3 22 fxe3 Bh6 23 Rf1 Qe5 24 Ng2 Qxh2 25 Kc1 when the players prematurely agreed a draw in Yakovich-Wedberg, Stockholm 2001.

12...b3

Another Yakovich-Wedberg game (Stockholm 1999) saw 12...Nh5!? 13 Bh6 Re8 14 Bd3 Nd7 15 0-0 Bf8 16 Bxf8 Kxf8 17 Nbd2 with even chances.

13 Qxb3 Nxe4 14 Bd3 f5!

TIP: A knight on e4 is a very strong asset for Black and he should hold on to it if the price is not too high.



Actually 14...f5 was a new move. Previously Black had retreated with 14...Nf6 15 0-0 Nbd7 16 Nc3 Rb8 17 Qa2 Re8 18 Rfe1 (18 h3 Bf8 19 Rfe1 was potentially a little better for White in Damaso-De Firmian, Lisbon 2000, but Black has both 18...Nb6!? and 18...Qb6!? as possible improvements) 18...Bf8 19 a5 Rxe1+ 20 Rxe1 Qc7 21 h3 Bb7 22 Bc4 and White was perhaps a little better in N.Pert-Emms, British Championship, Scarborough 2001.

15 0-0 Nd7 16 Re1 Rb8 17 Qc2 Rb4! (Diagram 4)

This active approach is much better than the calm one adopted by Chris Ward's good friend John Emms in the previous note.

18 Bh6 Re8 19 Bxe4

19 Nc3 Ndf6! leaves White with no easy way to improve his position. The game is probably level, but easier to play for Black.

19...fxe4 20 Rxe4 Rxe4 21 Qxe4 Bf6 22 Qc2 Ne5 23 Nbd2

After 23 Nxe5 Bxe5 24 Be3 Black can take a draw by 24...Bxh2+?! 25 Kxh2 Rxe3 26 fxe3 Qh4+ 27 Kg1 Qe1+, or justifiably play for more with 24...Bf5!? or 24...Qh4 25 g3 Qf6 26 Nc3 Bh3 with strong compensation based on his control of the light squares.

23...Bf5 24 Qb3 Nxf3+ 25 Nxf3 Qb8!

A brilliant concept – the two bishops are very strong in the endgame.

26 Qxb8 Rxb8 27 Re1

27 Bf4 Bxb2 28 Rd1 Bc2 29 Rd2 Bxa4 30 Bxd6 Rb7 gives Black excellent winning chances with the c-pawn, as 31 Bxc5?? Bd4! wins on the spot.

27...Rxb2 28 Bf4 c4!

The candidate runs for presidency!

29 h3 Rb1 30 Rxb1 Bxb1 31 Bxd6 Be4 32 Kf1 c3 33 Ke2 c2 34 Ba3 Bxf3+ 35 Kxf3 Bg5 36 Ke4 c1Q 37 Bxc1 Bxc1 38 Ke5 Kf7 39 Kd6 Ba3+ 40 Kd7 Kf6 41 f4 Kf5 42 d6 h5 43 g3 a5 0-1

Very clear play from Black. White was reduced to an observer.

The following game illustrates a bad black strategy and a forceful white response. However, if you study the notes you will see that Black has good options available. In particular, the f3-knight has to be taken in time.

Game 40

□ Browne ■ De Firmian

US Championship 1985

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 Bf4 a6 8 a4 Bg7 9 e4 Bg4 10 Be2 (Diagram 5) 10...0-0



TIP: In the Modern Benoni it is the fight for the e5-square that more than anything dominates the opening. Therefore Black should capture on f3 unprovoked, to make sure that White will not retain the knight and, at the same time, get rid of the only minor piece he has that cannot fight for e5 – the bishop on e2.

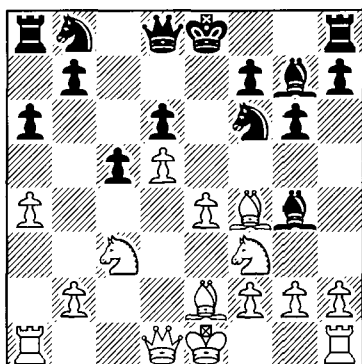


Diagram 5

Black should take the knight on f3

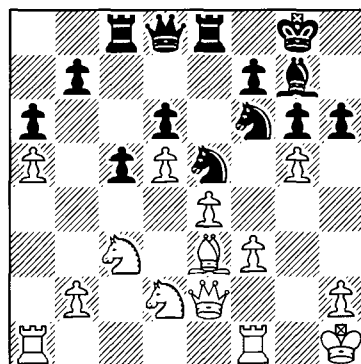


Diagram 6

Black is in trouble

Black should prefer 10...Bxf3! 11 Bxf3 0-0 12 0-0 Qe7 and then White has many moves. 13 e5!? dxe5 14 d6 Qe6 15 Rfe1 Nbd7 16 Bxb7 Ra7 is unclear; 13 Qd2 is perhaps White's most dangerous move, but it is not all that dangerous, e.g. 13...Nbd7 14 Rfe1 h5!? 15 h3 c4 16 Be2 Rac8 17 a5 Rfe8 18 Bf1 Nh7 19 Ra4 f5 with a complicated position in Van der Sterren-Psakhis, Tallinn 1987. Here is a great performance by one of our Modern Benoni heroes against 13 Qb3: 13...Nbd7 14 a5 (14 Qxb7 Rfb8 15 Qc6 Ne5 16 Bxe5 Qxe5 17 a5 Qe7 18 Ra2 Nd7 gave Black great compensation in Halkias-Vratonjic, Ikaros 1995) 14...Rab8 15 Na4 h5 16 Nb6 Ne8 17 Nxd7 Qxd7 18 Rfe1 Nc7 19 Be2 Rfe8 20 Bc4 Nb5 21 Bxb5 axb5 22 Qg3 Ra8 23 Re2 b4 24 h3 Ra6 25 Rae1 c4 26 Kh2 Rxa5 27 Bc1 c3 28 f4 Ra1 29 e5 dxe5 30 fxe5 cxb2 31 e6 fxe6 32 dxe6 Rxe6 33 Bxb2 Rxe1 34 Rxe1 Bxb2 35 Qb3 Qd6+ 36 Kh1 Be5 0-1 Roa Alonso-Topalov, Villarrobledo (rapid) 2000.

11 0-0 Re8

Black still has a chance for 11...Bxf3! 12 Bxf3 returning to the previous note. Instead 11...Qe7 12 Nd2 is similar to the game, and after 12...Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Nh5 14 Be3 Nd7 15 a5! White was slightly better in Kasparov-Suba, Lucerne Olympiad 1982.

12 Nd2!

Not 12 h3? Nxe4! 13 Nxe4 (or 13 hxg4 Bxc3 14 bxc3 Nxc3 and wins) 13...Rxe4 14 Bg5 Qe8 15 Bd3 Bxf3 16 Qxf3 Rb4 and Black won in Uhlmann-Fischer, Palma de Mallorca 1970.

12...Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Nh5 14 Be3 Nd7 15 a5!

15 g4 Nhf6 16 f3 has also been played. However, White has a great score with the text move.

15...Rc8

15...Qh4 16 Ra4!? Ne5 17 f3! Nf4 18 Bxf4 Qxf4 19 g3 Qf6 20 f4 with advantage for White (Naumkin-Minasian, Moscow 1992) is just one example

of how bad things can go for Black.

16 g4 Nhf6 17 f3 Ne5 18 Kh1 h6 19 g5! (Diagram 6)

All White needs to protect his king is the h2-pawn.

19...Nh5

19...hxg5 20 Bxg5 Qd7 21 f4 Neg4 22 h3 Nh6 23 Qf3 also leaves White with a very promising position.

20 f4!

20 gxh6!? Qh4! would allow Black counterplay, though maybe not enough.

20...Nd7 21 gxh6! Bxh6 22 Nc4 Qe7 23 Rae1 Bg7 24 Qf3 Rb8 25 Bd2 b5

Black has to do something to become active.

26 axb6 Nxb6 27 Na5 Qd7?!

27...Qc7 28 b3! Nd7! 29 Ne2, with only a slight edge for White, is better.

28 b3! Rbc8 29 Nc6 c4 30 b4 Kh7 31 f5!

Now the attack comes, and it is probably unstoppable.

31...Rg8

There was no defence anymore. If 31...Rh8 32 Rg1 Bf6 (or 32...Rcg8 33 Rxg6! fxg6 34 fxg6+! Kxg6 35 Ne7+ Qxe7 36 Qf5 mate) 33 e5! Bxe5 34 Nxe5 dxe5 35 fxg6+ fxg6 36 Rxg6 Kxg6 37 Rg1+ and Black is mated.

32 Rg1 Rh8

32...Bf6 33 Qe3! and 32...Rcf8 33 Rxg6! are both lost for Black as well.

33 Rg5 Bf6 34 fxg6+ fxg6 35 Rxh5+ 1-0

Black lost on time in a lost position.

The Greedy Qb3 and Qxb7

In the final game of this chapter we will look at a very greedy sideline in which White tries to exploit the early ...Bc8-g4. Actually Black players should positively hope to meet this, as the whole line portrays the perfect dark square strategy. When Black plays the Modern Benoni, he dreams of getting such middlegame positions, and White is usually without hope.

Statistics

9 Qb3 is a disaster. It is greedy and against all principles and common sense. After 9...Bxf3 10 Qxb7 Nbd7! 11 gxf3 Bg7 White's score is down to a meagre 15%. This is as bad as the worst lines of the Morra Gambit!

Game 41

E.Kurz Emms

German Oberliga 1991

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 c4 d6 5 Nc3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 e4 a6 8 a4 Bg4

Starting Out: The Modern Benoni

Now Black will achieve his aim and exchange his bad bishop. White tries to exploit this by snatching a pawn, something which cannot be recommended.

9 Qb3 Bxf3 10 Qxb7

10 gxf3 makes little sense to me. Black has several good tries for an advantage: 10...Qc7 (or 10...Qe7 11 a5 Bg7 12 Bg2 0-0 13 0-0 Nbd7! 14 f4 Rab8 15 Qd1 Ne8 16 Re1 b5 17 axb6 Rxb6 18 Ra4 Bd4 Porper-Psakhis, Israel 1991, and I prefer Black) 11 Bg2 Nbd7 12 0-0 Bg7 13 f4 0-0 14 Rd1 Rab8 15 Be3 Qd8 16 e5?! (but already it was not nice to be White; ...Ng4 was maybe coming, or if 16 h3 Nh5) 16...dxe5 17 fxe5 Ng4 18 e6 Nxe3 19 fxe3 Ne5 20 d6 c4 21 e7 cxb3 22 exd8Q Rfxd8 23 Rd4 Nc6 24 Rd2 Bxc3 25 bxc3 Ne5 and Black won in Abdulla-Ward, British Championship 1999.

10...Nbd7!

I have no doubt that this is the right move, and that the desperado oriented 10...Bxg2 is inferior. I see no advantage for White in having the f3-pawn, but I do see an advantage in a developing move.

11 gxf3 Bg7 (Diagram 7)

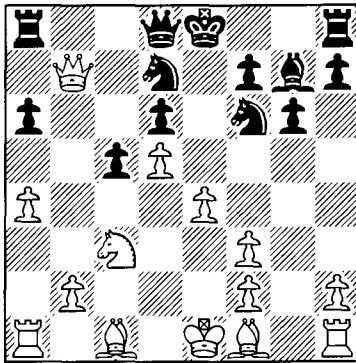


Diagram 7

This position is great for Black

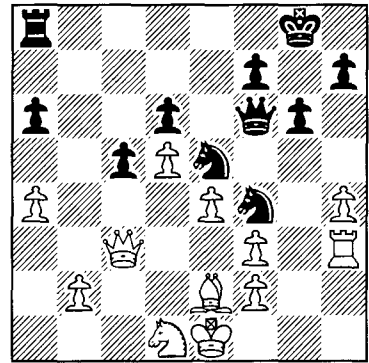


Diagram 8

The black army is totally dominant

12 Qb3

White has also tried:

a) 12 Qc6 0-0 13 Qxd6 is very greedy. Black was very happy with his game after 13...Nh5 14 f4 (if 14 Bh3 f5!) 14...Re8 15 Be2 Ra7 (threatening 16...Bf8 17 Qc6 Nb8) 16 a5 Qh4 17 Bxh5 Qxh5 18 Be3 Rc8 19 Qe7? (19 f5 was the last try: Black has a draw with 19...Be5 20 Qe7 Bf6, or can play for more with 20...Rb8! 21 fxg6 hxg6, when a possible line is 22 Na4 Bxb2 23 Rd1 Rb4 24 Nxb2 Rxb2 25 0-0 Ne5 26 Qd8+ Kh7 27 Bf4 Qg4+ 28 Bg3 Nf3+ 29 Kh1 Qxe4 30 Qf6 Ng5+ 31 f3 Qe2 32 Bf2 Nxf3 and White is busted; actually I see no other logical outcome) 19...Bf6 20 Qd6 Qh4! 0-1 Papp-Hoffmann, Budapest 2003, since the cheeky queen is trapped.

b) 12 Bf4 Rb8 13 Qxa6 Nh5!? (13...Rxb2 is possibly stronger, since if 14

Nb5 0-0 15 Bxd6 Nxe4! 16 fxe4 Qh4 17 Be2 Rxe2+! 18 Kxe2 Qxe4+ 19 Kd2 Qxd5+ 20 Kc2 Qe4+ 21 Kd2 Ra8 wins) 14 Bc1 0-0 15 Be2 Be5 (15...f5 is also good) 16 h4 Nf4 17 Bb5 f5 18 Bxf4 Bxf4 19 Bxd7 Qxd7 20 Qe2 Be5 with compensation in Van Wely-Topalov, Antwerp 1997.

12...0-0 13 Be2

Worse is 13 Qd1 Nh5 14 f4 Qh4 15 Qf3 f5 16 exf5 Rxf5 and Black is already clearly better. Crouch-Povah, Portsmouth 2003, concluded 17 Qh3 Re8+ 18 Be3 Bxc3+ 19 bxc3 Qf6 20 Kd2 Nxf4 21 Bxf4 Rxf4 22 Bxa6 Rxf2+ 23 Kd1 Qf4 0-1.

13...Nh5 14 h4

If 14 f4 Qh4 gives Black good counterplay, e.g. 15 Bxh5 Qxh5 16 Ne2 Rab8 17 Qc2 Rb4 18 0-0 Rfb8 and Black had the upper hand in Freitag-Baumegger, Austrian Championship 2000.

14...Be5 15 Bg5 Qa5 16 Bd2 Bf4!

A nice positional move. It now becomes clear that White's e2-bishop is the worst piece on the board.

17 Qc2 Qd8 18 Nd1 Ne5

18...Bxd2+ 19 Qxd2 Qf6 seems more logical, with excellent compensation for the pawn.

19 Ne3 Qf6 20 Rh3 Bh6 21 Ng4?!

After this White is positionally busted. Better was 21 Bc3! Nf4 22 Ng4 Nxc4 23 fxg4 (23 Bxf6 Ng2+ 24 Kf1 N4e3+ 25 fxe3 Nxe3+ 26 Kg1 Nxc2 27 Rb1 Rfb8 gives Black the advantage) 23...Qe7 24 Rh1 Rfe8 with unclear play.

21...Bxd2+ 22 Qxd2 Qg7 23 Ne3 Rfb8 24 Nd1 Rb3 25 Rc1 Qf6

White is slowly being pushed off the board.

26 Rc3 Rxc3 27 Qxc3 Nf4 (Diagram 8) 28 Rh2 c4 29 Kd2 Nxe2 30 Kxe2 Rb8

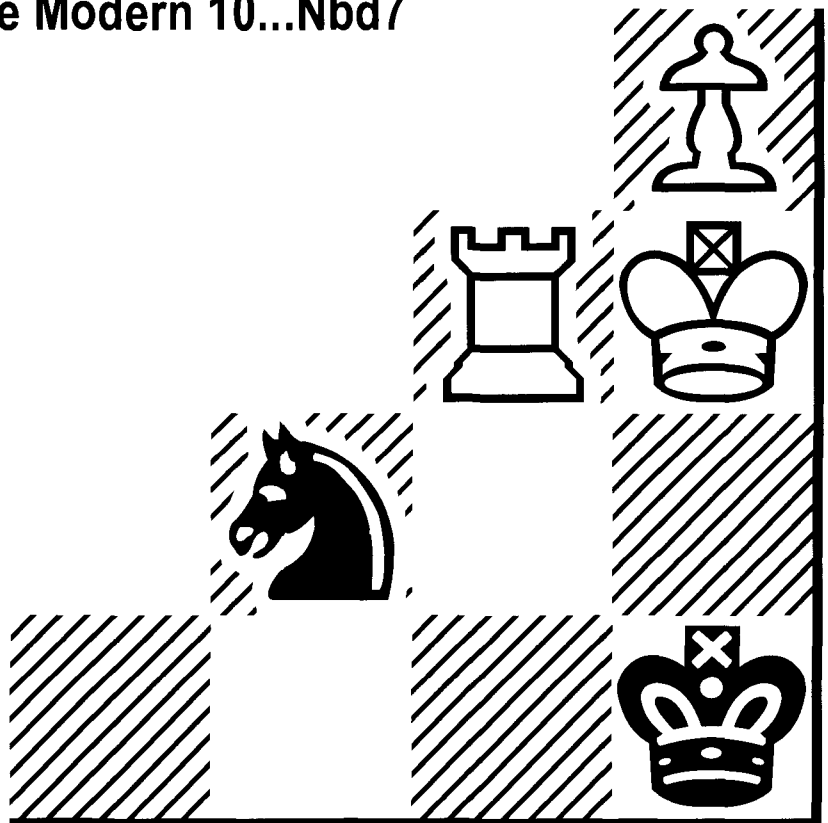
And Black is winning. White has virtually no moves.

31 Rh3 Rb3 32 Qc1 Nxf3 33 Rg3 Nd4+ 34 Ke1 Qxh4 35 Qxc4 Qxe4+ 36 Kf1 Rxc3 37 fxg3 Qh1+ 0-1

Chapter Eight

Classical Main Line: Nf3-d2 and e2-e4

- Introduction
- The Old Main Line: 10...Na6
- The Modern 10...Nbd7



Introduction

In this, the final chapter of the book, we shall be looking at the Classical Main Line, which can arise in many different ways. One is a normal Modern Benoni in which Black delays ...Bg4 in favour of ...Re8. Another is the more forcing line with an early Nf3-d2, and only then followed by e2-e4 and Be2; this way Black cannot avoid the line. A third way is via the Classical King's Indian: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Be2 c5 7 d5 e6 8 0-0 Re8 9 Nd2 exd5 10 cxd5.

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 (Diagram 1)

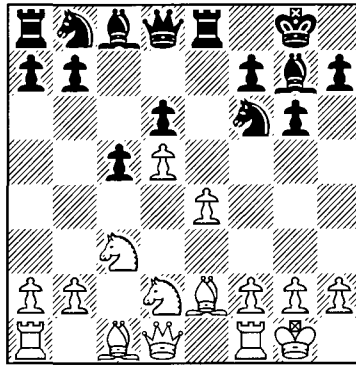


Diagram 1
The Classical Main Line

Plans for Black

Black has two plans in this position: the modern ...Nd7-e5 and the older ...Na6-c7. We shall start with three games with the older line and finish the book with two games showing the more modern and dynamic approach.

In the first game we shall watch Mikhail Tal, who is the most inspiring Modern Benoni player through the ages. Tal played a lot of complicated games in the Modern Benoni, many of which were decided only after mutual mistakes. In this game, however, only White made inaccurate moves.

Why Play this with White?

This is a very solid way of playing the white side of the Modern Benoni. By playing Nf3-d2 and then f2-f3 the centre is thereby strengthened and will not easily be undermined. This certainly appeals to many players. However, if Black gets to play ...b5, you could say that White lacks play in the centre. Practice shows that you cannot end the discussion that easily.

Theoretical?

Not especially – which is probably another feature that attracts many White players to these positions. The Modern Benoni is a sharp opening, and sometimes White risks getting blown away. By adopting this classical set-up, the hope is to secure the draw at least, and only then start to fight for the full point.

Statistics

The system is very popular. After 10 Nd2 Na6 White scores 53% over 841 games. After the more modern 10...Nbd7 White also keeps an edge: 54% vs. 46% in 949 games. So the variation is a classical one, equivalent to the main line Ruy Lopez and other such openings that have been around for a very long time.

The Old Main Line 10...Na6

Game 42

□ Ufimtsev ■ Tal

USSR Team Championship 1967

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 Na6 11 Kh1 Nc7 12 a4 Rb8 13 f4

This is probably a misunderstanding of the position. Instead 13 f3 b6 is Game 44.

13...a6 14 a5 Bd7 15 Bf3

15 e5!? dxe5 16 Nc4 Bb5 17 d6 Ne6 18 fxe5 Nd7 as in Vaissier-Ibragimov, Bern 1992, is probably good for Black.

15...Nb5 (Diagram 2)

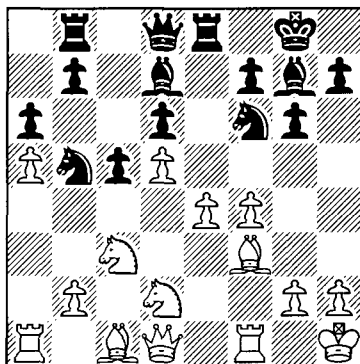


Diagram 2

Black has adequate counterplay

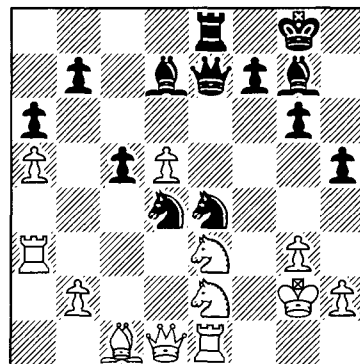


Diagram 3

Black to play and win

16 e5?!

White is putting all his hopes on the passed d-pawn, but Black has many good answers to this. Instead 16 Re1 Nd4 17 Nc4 Bb5 18 Nb6 Nd7 with equal chances was to be preferred.

16...dxe5 17 fxe5 Rxe5 18 Nc4 Rf5!?

18...Re8 19 Bf4 Nxc3 20 bxc3 Bb5 looks a more straightforward way to play; after 21 Nd6 Bxf1 22 Nxe8 Bxg2+ 23 Bxg2 Nxe8 24 Bxb8 Qxb8 the position is not so clear, but it should favour Black.

19 Ne3 Rf4! 20 Ne2 Rh4 21 g3 Re4!?

More natural was 21...Rb4! when White is under a lot of pressure, but Tal liked to play the most unclear move, rather than the best move.

22 Bxe4 Nxe4 23 Nf4 Nd4 24 Kg2 Qe7 25 Re1 h5 26 Ra3 Re8 27 Ne2?? (Diagram 3)

A fatal blunder that allows for Tal to finish in style. Instead 27 Nc4 Bg4 28 Qa4 was necessary when 28...Bd7 29 Qd1 Bg4 is a draw, while 28...g5!? 29 Nd2 f5 is unclear.

27...Bh3+!!

Probably quite a surprise.

28 Kxh3

If 28 Kg1 Nf3+ 29 Kh1 Nf2 mate.

28...Ng5+! 0-1

White is mated after 29 Kg2 (or 29 Kh4 Ndf3) 29...Qe4+ 30 Kf1 Qf3+ 31 Kg1 Nh3.

Another great player to play this line with Black was Bobby Fischer, the only American ever to win the World Championship. Fischer even played it against Boris Spassky in their notorious 1972 World Championship match in Reykjavik. Here we shall see the great Bobby in his usual form.

Game 43

□ Najdorf ■ Fischer

Havana Olympiad 1966

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 d6 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Be2 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5 Re8 10 Nd2 Na6 11 f3 Nc7 12 a4 b6

Play can continue without the insertion of ...b6 and Kh1. After 12...Nd7 13 Nc4 Ne5 14 Ne3 f5 15 f4 (15 exf5 gxf5 16 f4 Ng6 17 Kh1 Bd4 18 Nc4 is meant to be better for White, but after 18...b6! with the idea of simply taking d5 and developing freely, I actually prefer Black!) 15...Nf7 16 exf5 Nh6! (compare 17 exf5 in the main game) 17 fxg6?! (17 Kh1 Nxf5 18 Nxf5 Bxf5 is equal according to Maric, but I already feel inclined towards the black position) 17...Bd4! (the difference; surprisingly White seems to be in trouble here) 18 gxh7+ Kh8 19 Rf3 Ng4 20 Qd3 Qh4 21 h3 Nxe3 22 Rxe3?? (22 Bxe3! is the only move; after 22...Rxe3 23 Rxe3 Qxf4 24 Kh1 Qxe3 25 Qxe3 Bxe3 26 Rf1 White is struggling, but the game is still not that clear) 22...Qxf4 23 Nd1 Nxd5 24 Ra3 Nxe3 25 Nxe3 Bf5 26 Qb3 Bxh7

27 Kh1 Be5! 28 Kg1 Qh2+ 29 Kf2 Bg3+ 30 Kf3 Be4+ 31 Kg4 Rg8+ 0-1
B.Toth-Matulovic, Hungary 1972.

13 Kh1!

13 Nc4 Ba6 14 Bg5 featured in the Introduction to this book.

a) 14...Qd7 15 Rb1 Bxc4 16 Bxc4 a6 17 b4 b5 18 Bd3 c4 19 Bc2 bxa4! (an important move, otherwise the queenside counterplay is lost) 20 Bxa4 Nb5 was OK for Black in Beliavsky-Portisch, Szirak zonal 1987 (see page 32 for the rest of the game).

b) 14...h6 15 Bd2 Bxc4 16 Bxc4 a6 17 Qe2 Nd7 18 Kh1 f5! and Black was fine in Kamsky-Ivanchuk, Amber (rapid) 1994 (see page 49 for the rest of the game).

13...Nd7

The main alternative, 13...Rb8 14 Nc4 Ba6, is seen in Game 44.

14 Nc4

14 Ra3!? is interesting, and then 14...Qe7! 15 Nb5 (15 Nc4 Ba6 should be fine) 15...Nxb5 16 Bxb5 Rd8 (16...Rf8!?) 17 a5 a6 (17...Rb8!?) 18 Bc6 (18 Bxd7 Bxd7 19 axb6 Bb5 is more than OK for Black) 18...Rb8 19 axb6 Nxb6 (or 19...Ne5!?) 20 b7 Bxb7 21 Bxb7 Qxb7 22 f4 Nd7 23 Nc4 Nf6 24 Na5 Qb5 25 Nc6 Nxe4 was given by Kramnik, and honestly I prefer Black) 20 b3 Be5 (20...Nd7 21 Nc4 Ne5 is unclear – Kramnik) 21 f4 Bg7 22 f5! (22 Qe2 f5! with full equality would be nice for Black) 22...Nd7 23 Bxd7 Bxd7 24 Qf3 Bd4 25 f6 Qf8 26 Nc4 Bb5 27 Be3 Bxe3 28 Qxe3 and White had a slight pull in Kramnik-Topalov, Dortmund 2001.

14...Ne5 15 Ne3 f5

Otherwise the knight would have to return to d7 where it is not doing much.

16 f4 Nf7 17 exf5 gxf5 18 Bd3 Qf6 (Diagram 4)

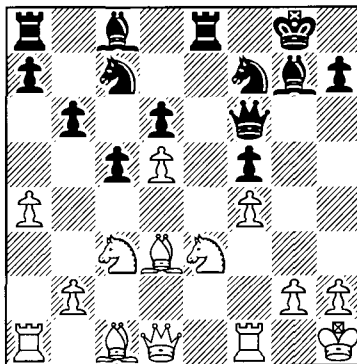


Diagram 4

Is White really better here?

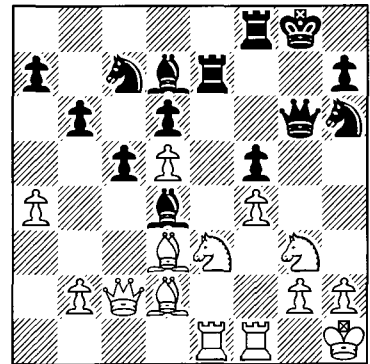


Diagram 5

White is under pressure

This position is better for White according to some annotators. However, I

am far from sure about this – and the practical examples are with me. Instead, 18...Nh6 19 Qc2 Qf6 20 Bd2 (20 a5 should be answered by 20...Ba6!) 20...Bd7 21 Rf3 gave White a slight advantage in Kramnik-Topalov, Monaco (rapid) 2001.

19 Ne2

After 19 a5 Bd7 (not 19...Ba6? 20 Nxf5!) 20 Qc2 Nh6 is probably about level. Now in Bücken-Seidel, email Germany 2001, White went overboard with 21 g4?! Nxg4 22 Nxg4 fxg4 23 Bxh7+ Kh8 24 Bg6 and Black replied in similar fashion with 24...Nxd5!! 25 Bxe8 (if 25 Nxd5 Bc6 26 Be4 Qd4! and Black is better) 25...Rxe8 26 Nxd5 Bc6 27 Rd1 Qe6 28 Qf2 Bxd5+ 29 Kg1 Qe4 and Black won: 30 Rxd5 Qxd5 31 Bd2 Bxb2 32 Re1 Rxe1+ 33 Qxe1 Bd4+ 34 Be3 Bxe3+ 35 Qxe3 Qd4 0-1. A great game for Black who played better than my computer!

19...Nh6 20 Ng3 Qg6 21 Qc2 Rf8 22 Bd2 Bd7 23 Rae1

23 Rf3! was meant to give White a clear edge, but honestly I cannot see it. My computer is quite greedy, while the practical game is quite sensible. Let us look at both:

a) 23...Qf7?! is the computer's go. After 24 Bc3 Nxd5? 25 Nxd5 Qxd5 26 Bxg7 Kxg7 suddenly it is not so happy anymore, as White wins with 27 Bc4 Qc6 (or 27...Qd4 28 Rd3) 28 Nh5+ Kg6 29 Qc3! and mate in three moves.

b) 23...Rae8 24 Ne2 (if 24 Bc3!? Bxc3 25 bxc3 Re7 followed by ...Rg7 and Black should be OK) 24...Kh8 25 Nc4? (this looks like a blunder) 25...Nxd5 26 Rg3 Qf6 27 Nc3 Nb4 28 Qb1 Ng4 29 Nd1 Qh4 0-1 Romito-Guerrini, Correspondence 1984.

23...Rae8 24 Be2 Re7 25 Bd3 Bd4! (Diagram 5)

White is under quite a bit of pressure here and will soon experience problems with his d-pawn. Over the next few moves he lost the last chance to put up a fight and was then easily dispatched by the American super-technician.

26 b4 Bxe3 27 Bxe3 Rfe8 28 bxc5 bxc5 29 Bd2 Rxe1 30 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 31 Bxe1 Nxd5 32 Bc4 Qe6 33 Bc3 Bc6 34 Qb3 Kf7 35 Qb8 Ng8 36 h3 Nge7 37 Qh8 Qh6 38 Ne2 Bxa4 39 Qa8 Bc6 40 Qxa7 Qe6 41 Qa2 Qe4 42 Bd2 Ke8 43 Ng3 Qd4 44 Kh2 Ne3 45 Bxe3 Qxe3 46 Bg8 Qxf4 47 Qf7+ Kd7 48 Bxh7 Be4 49 Bg6 Qe5 50 Bh5 Bd5 51 Qe8+ Kc7 52 Kg1 Qg7 53 Bd1 Bc6 0-1

Between Tal and Fischer (as older grandmasters who played the Modern Benoni) and Topalov and Ivanchuk (as the modern players employing it), John Nunn's name is one of the most prominent. We shall first see him playing the solid ...Na6, and afterwards the more modern ...Nd7.

Game 44

□ Portisch ■ Nunn

London 1982

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 Na6 11 Kh1 Rb8 12 f3 Nc7 13 a4 b6 14 Nc4

Ba6 15 Bg5 Qd7!? (Diagram 6)

Instead 15...h6 (if 15...Bxc4?! 16 Bxc4 a6 17 Qd3 Qc8 18 Bf4 Bf8 19 Rab1 intending b2-b4 favours White) 16 Bd2!?

(or 16 Be3 Qd7 17 Qd2 Kh7 18 b3 Bxc4 19 bxc4 Na6 20 Bd3 Nb4 21 Bb1 Qe7 22 Re1 Nh5 23 Ra3 a6 24 g3 Qd7 25 Kg2 Re7 26 h3 Rbe8 27 f4 Nf6 with a slight edge for White in Panno-Gutierrez, Bogota 1978) 16...Bxc4 17 Bxc4 a6 18 Qe2 Qc8 19 Bf4 is unpleasant for Black, as 19...Qd7?! does not work on account of 20 Bxa6 Nfxd5 21 Nxd5 Nxd5 22 Bb5! Nxf4 23 Qd2 and White wins.

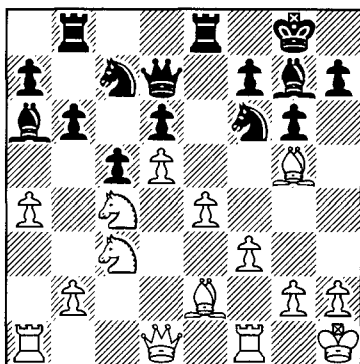


Diagram 6

A standard main line position

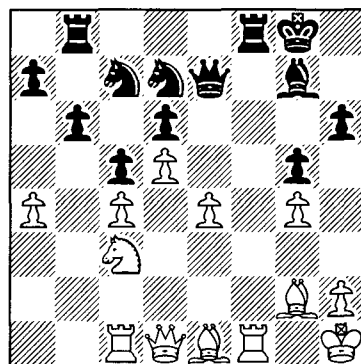


Diagram 7

Black controls the dark squares

16 b3

16 Rb1 Bxc4 17 Bxc4 a6 18 b4 b5 19 Bd3 c4 20 Bc2 bxa4! 21 Bxa4 Nb5 would equalise for Black quite comfortable.

White's strongest move is 16 Re1! preparing a set-up targeting the centre rather than the queenside. After 16...Bxc4 17 Bxc4 a6 18 Bf1! (playing against the ...b6-b5 push), we have the following options:

- a) 18...b5 19 axb5 axb5 20 Ra7 Qd8 21 b4! cxb4 22 Na2 favours White.
- b) 18...h6 19 Be3 Kh7 (19...b5 20 axb5 axb5 21 Ra7 is not what Black is looking for) 20 Qd2 Qc8! (20...b5 21 axb5 axb5 22 Ra7 is again unpleasant, while 20...Rb7 21 Rab1 b5 22 b4 c4 23 a5! left Black with little counterplay in Pinter-Brynell, Elista 1998) 21 Rab1 b5 22 b4 c4 23 a5 Qd7 24 Bd4 was Van der Sterren-Emms, German Bundesliga 1995. White is always a little better in these positions as Black has lost his active play. Still, it is not worse than many other openings.
- c) 18...Ra8!? is my unorthodox suggested solution. After 19 Qb3 Reb8 20 Ra3 (I do not see how White will improve his position other than playing against the ...b7-b5 push) 20...h6! (the king needs h7 in some lines) 21 Be3 Black can try something solid like 21...Qe7, claiming that 22 Rea1 is not really doing him any harm; or maybe 21...Ra7!? with the idea of ...Rab7 and ...b6-b5; or simply sacrifice a pawn with 21...b5 22 axb5 axb5 23 Rxa8 Rxa8 24 Bxb5 Rb8 when White's most dangerous line is probably

25 Bxd7 (if 25 Ra1!? Nxb5 26 Ra5 Nxe4 27 fxe4 Bxc3 28 bxc3 Qe8 and Black is no worse), but after 25...Rxb3 26 Bc6 Rxb2 27 e5 dxe5 28 Bxc5 Rc2 29 Bb4 Bf8 30 Ba5 Bd6 Black looks fine to me.

16...Nh5 17 Rc1

After 17 Qd2 Bxc4 18 bxc4 f6 19 Be3 f5 20 Rac1 White has a slight advantage (Nunn). Instead 17...Bxc3!? 18 Qxc3 Nxd5 is risky, but I am not sure that it isn't fully playable. Often you have to take these pawns, or White will get too much space.

17...f6 18 Be3 f5 19 g4?!

White does not have enough for the pawn after 19 f4 Bxc4 20 bxc4 Nf6 21 e5 dxe5 22 d6 Na6 23 fxe5 Rxe5 24 Bf4 Ree8 (Nunn), but 19 Qd2 seems reasonable.

19...Bxc4 20 bxc4 fxg4 21 fxg4 Nf6 22 Bf3 Qe7 23 Bg5 h6?!

23...Qe5 24 Qd2 Nd7 would have been better according to Nunn.

24 Bh4 g5 25 Be1 Rf8 26 Bg2 Nd7 (Diagram 7) 27 Rxf8+?!

27 Rf5 was an improvement.

27...Rxf8

'The sort of move one plays without really thinking, but 27...Nxf8 was better.' – Nunn. The reason is that the knight will be well placed on g6, assisted by the bishop on e5, and Black is better.

28 Ne2 Be5 29 Qd3 Ne8 30 Bd2 Qg7 31 Rf1 Rxf1+ 32 Bxf1 Qf7 33 Kg2?

33 Bg2 Qf2 34 Qf3 Qxf3 35 Bxf3 is better, when White would still have been able to make the draw. Now he loses a pawn.

33...Nef6

33...Bxh2!? was supposedly a mistake because of 34 Qh3, but after 34...Ne5! 35 Bc3 Nf6 36 Bxe5 Bxe5 37 Qxh6 Nxe4 38 Qe6 Kg7 39 Qxf7+ Kxf7 Black should win the endgame even with opposite-coloured bishops.

34 h3 Qg6 35 Nc3 Bxc3 36 Bxc3 Qxe4+ 37 Qxe4 Nxe4

Black should win this endgame as well, and he did.

38 Be1 Ne5 39 Be2 Kf7 40 Bf3 Nf6 41 Be2 Ng6 42 Bf1 h5! 43 gxh5 Nxb5 44 Kf3 Ne5+ 45 Ke4 Kg6 46 Be2 Nf6+ 47 Ke3 Kf5 48 Bc3 a6 49 Be1 g4! 50 hxg4+ Nfxg4+ 51 Kd2 Ke4 52 Kc3 Ke3 53 Bd1 Nf3 54 Bg3 Nf2 55 Bc2 Ng5 56 Kb2 Nge4 57 Bh4 Kd4 58 Bb3 Nd3+ 59 Ka3 Ne5 0-1

The Modern 10...Nbd7

In the following game Nunn adopts a dubious strategy (the idea of 12...Nh5 has been discredited many times), but it pays off in a madness of tactics. Black should prefer 12...g5, as given in the notes, playing thematically on the kingside dark squares.

Game 45

□ Polugaevsky ■ Nunn

European Team Championship, Skara 1980

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 c4 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 Nbd7 11 Qc2

Sometimes White plays first 11 a4 Ne5 12 Qc2 (12 Ra3 g5 13 Re1 Ng6 14 Bb5 Re7 15 Nf1 a6 16 Bc4 h6 17 Ng3 Bd7 18 a5 Ng4 19 Be2 N4e5 was fine for Black in Xu Jun-Bu Xiangzhi, HeiBei 2001) 12...g5! (12...a6 transposes to Game 46) 13 Nf3 Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 h6? (this move should usually be avoided; instead 14...Nd7 15 Bg4 Ne5 16 Bxc8 Rxc8 looks absolutely fine for Black) 15 Bd2 a6 16 Be2 Qe7 17 Rae1 Qe5 18 Kh1 Qd4 19 f3 Nh5 was Gligoric-Fischer, Palma de Mallorca 1970, and now 20 g3 (threatening Nd1, f3-f4) would have been good for White (Gligoric).

11...Ne5 12 b3 (Diagram 8)

This was Polugaevsky's pet line. The main alternative 12 a4 transposes to the previous note (after 12...g5) or to the next game (after 12...a6).

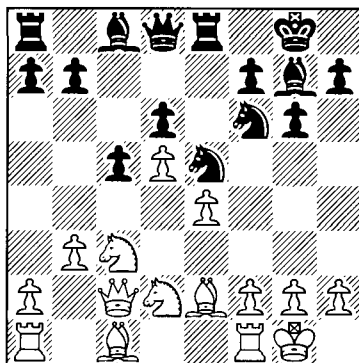


Diagram 8

Polugaevsky's speciality

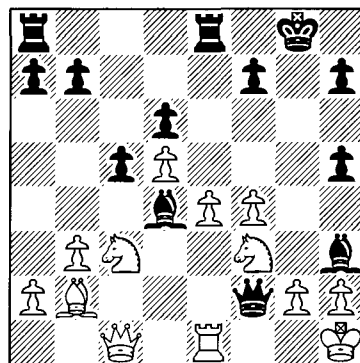


Diagram 9

Once again, this destructive bishop move

12...Nh5?

This move was inspired by the classic game Spassky-Fischer, Reykjavik 1972. However, the idea is not very sound and Nunn, revising his annotations over the years, went from thinking it was dubious to thinking it was just bad.

a) 12...g5 is the better move with some different options after 13 Bb2.

a1) 13...a6 14 a4 Ng6 (or 14...b6 15 Rfe1 Ra7 16 Ba3 Ng6 17 b4 Nf4 18 Bf1 Ng4 19 Nf3 Nxf2!! 20 Kxf2 g4 21 g3 Ng6 and Black was better in Roeber-Lindemann, German Bundesliga 2001; I like the black play in that game, though I do not know the players) 15 g3 Bh3 16 Rfe1 Rb8 17 a5 Nd7 18 Nd1 Bd4 19 Bxd4 cxd4 20 f3 Nde5 21 Nf2 Bd7 22 Qb2 b6 23 Qxd4 bxa5 24 Bxa6 Rxb3 25 Be2 Rb4 with sufficient counterplay in Gligoric-Sax, Niksic 1983.

a2) 13...g4 14 Rfe1 Nh5 15 Nd1 Nf4 (15...Qh4!?) 16 Bb5 Rf8 17 Ne3 Qg5 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 exf5 Ned3? (a strange mistake; Black had an easy option in 19...Nf3+! 20 Nxf3 gxf3 21 g3 Bxb2 22 Qxb2 Qxf5 23 Qd2 Nh3+ 24 Kh1 a6 25 Bf1 Rfe8 and White is struggling) 20 Bxd3 Bxb2 21 Rad1 Bd4 22 Ne4 Qxf5 23 Ng3 Qg5 24 Bxh7+ Kh8 25 Qf5 and now White had the edge in Korchnoi-Mecking, Augusta (match) 1974.

b) 12...a6 13 Bb2 b5 is also possible, and then 14 a4 b4 15 Nd1 g5 16 Ne3 Ra7 17 Rae1 Rae7 18 f3 Nh5 19 Ndc4 Ng6 20 Bxg7 Nxg7 is equal according to Nunn. We will not lose anything by seeing all the game: 21 Bd3 f6 22 a5 Nf4 23 Qd2 f5 24 Bb1 fxe4 25 Bxe4 h5 26 Nb6 Bd7 27 Nec4 Bf5 28 g3 Nh3+ 29 Kg2 g4 30 Bxf5 Nxf5 31 fxg4 hxg4 32 Qd1 Rxe1 33 Rxe1 Rxe1 34 Qxe1 Qf6 35 Nd7?? (an unfortunate blunder) 35...Nh4+ 0-1 Polugaevsky-Lobron, Manila 1982.

13 Bxh5 gxh5 14 Bb2 Bd7 15 Rae1 Qh4 16 f4?

16 Re3 was just one of several moves securing White an advantage.

16...Ng4 17 Nf3 Bd4+ 18 Kh1 Nf2+ 19 Rxf2 Qxf2 20 Qc1

20 Qb1 Bh3! 21 Rg1 Bg4 22 Rf1 Qe3 has been analysed in detail by Dvoretzky, Yusupov, Dolmatov, Dreev and of course Nunn. They all agree that Black is better.

20...Bh3! (Diagram 9)

The only move, but more than good enough.

21 Rg1 Kf8!

21...Bg4 was equally strong and equally complicated.

22 Nxd4 cxd4 23 f5?

23 Ba3 was White's best chance. After 23...Rec8! 24 f5! Rxc3 25 Qh6+ Ke8 26 Qxd6 Bxg2+ 27 Rxc3 Qe1+ 28 Rg1 Qxe4+ 29 Rg2 Black must take a draw according to Dvoretzky and his pupils. However, Nunn came up with 29...Rd8 30 Qf8+ Kd7 31 Qxf7+ Kc8 32 Qe6+ Qxe6 33 dxe6 Rf3 34 Rc2+ Kb8 35 e7 and now 35...Rg8! 36 Bd6+ Ka8 37 h4 Rxf5 38 Rd2 b6 when Black has fair winning chances. I recommend to anyone who wants to experience really deep and splendid analysis that they go through Nunn's two books of his own games, *Secrets of Grandmaster Chess* (2nd edition) and *John Nunn's Best Games*.

23...dxc3 24 Qxc3 Rxe4 25 gxh3 Ke8! 26 Qd3 Re1 27 Rxe1+

If 27 Qb5+ Kf8 28 Bg7+ Kg8 and Black wins.

27...Qxe1+ 28 Kg2 Rc8 29 f6 Kd7 30 Qxh7 Qd2+ 31 Kg3 Qxd5 32 Kh4 Re8 0-1

In the final game of this book we shall see in action another hero of the Modern Benoni, the Yugoslav Grandmaster Velimirovic.

Game 46

□ Portisch ■ Velimirovic

Ljubljana 1975

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8

Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 Nbd7 11 a4 a6 12 Qc2 Ne5 13 Ra3 Qe7

The better of the two main lines. 13...g5?! has often been played, but I think it is just bad here. White has two good continuations as I see it:

a) 14 Nd1 (heading for f5) 14...Ng6 15 Ne3 Nf4 16 Bd1 b6 17 f3 Rb8 18 g3 Ng6 (18...Nh3+! has been suggested by Velickovic; after 19 Kg2, however, I do not see an easy defence against 20 Nf5) 19 Ndc4 h6 20 Bd2 and White was better in Spraggett-Barlov, New York Open 1987.

b) 14 a5!? (this has scored very highly for White) 14...Rb8 15 f3 Nh5 16 g3 Bh3 17 Rf2 Qd7 18 Na4 Qe7 19 Nb6 Nd7 20 Nxd7 Bxd7 21 Nc4 and again White was better in Kaczorowski-Van Kempen, email 1999.

14 a5

After 14 h3 Rb8 15 f4 Ned7 16 a5 b5 17 axb6 Nxb6 18 Bxa6 Bxa6 19 Rxa6 Nfd7 looked a bit risky, but following 20 Qd3 (20 Kh1!? looks stronger, and if 20...c4 21 Na4) 20...c4 21 Qf3 Nc5 22 Ra3 Bxc3 23 Rxc3 Nxe4 Black was better in Hunanyan-Beridze, Batumi 2003.

14...Bd7 (Diagram 10)

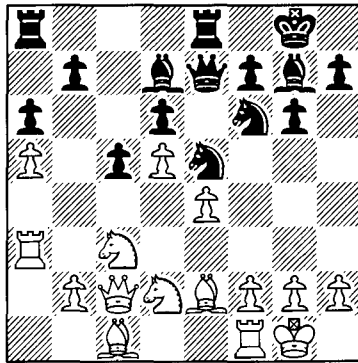


Diagram 10

Another fairly standard position

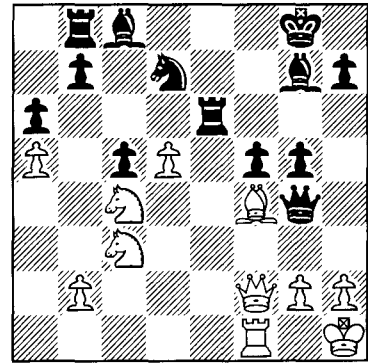


Diagram 11

White has a choice of rooks

15 Rb3

I really do not fancy this idea. Instead 15 Re1 Nfg4!? is really interesting, when the critical reply is probably 16 Nf1 or something, as after 16 h3?! Black has all the fun: 16...Nxf2! 17 Kxf2 Qh4+ 18 Kf1 Bxh3 19 Nd1? (if 19 gxh3? Qxh3+ 20 Kf2 Qh2+ 21 Kf1 Bf6 followed by ...Bh4 gives Black a decisive attack; instead 19 Bf3! keeps White in the game, though it is still dangerous for him) 19...Bxg2+! (winning) 20 Kxg2 Qxe1 21 Nf1 f5! 22 Nf2 fxe4 23 Nxe4 c4 24 Nxd6 Nd3! 0-1 M.Kratochvil-Riha, Correspondence 1997.

15...Rab8 16 Rb6 Bg4 17 f3 Bc8 18 Kh1 Qc7

This position is generally acknowledged as equal. Personally I cannot see that White is going to get anything good out of having a rook on b6.

19 f4?!

Throwing everything into it, but without a real payout. 19 Nc4 Nxc4 20 Bxc4 Nd7! 21 Qa4 Qd8 22 Rb3 Be5 23 Bd3 is better, though Black, with his threats to the kingside, is to be preferred.

19...Ned7 20 e5

Or 20 Rb3 Qxa5 21 Nc4 Qc7 22 e5 dxe5 23 fxe5 Nxe5 24 Nxe5 Rxe5 25 Bf4 b5 and Black is better.

20...dxe5 21 fxe5 Qxe5 22 Nc4 Qd4?!

This allows White rather too much counterplay. Instead 22...Qe7!? 23 d6 Qe6 looks very strong for Black.

23 Rd6 Ng4 24 Bxg4 Qxg4 25 Qf2 f5 26 Bf4!

26 Qf4!? was possible. After 26...Nf6 27 Rb6 Ra8 28 Nd6 White has yet to equalise, but is likely to be successful.

26...g5?

Now Black gets into trouble.

27 Re6! Rxe6 (Diagram 11) 28 Bxb8?

A bad mistake. White should take the other rook: 28 dxe6! gxf4 (if 28...Qxf4 29 e7! Nf6 30 Qe2 wins for White) 29 e7! Nf6 (29...Qh5 30 Re1 is bad business as well) 30 Qxc5 Bd7 31 Ne5 and Black is lost after 31...Qh5 32 Nxd7 Nxd7 33 Qd5+ Qf7 34 Qxd7 as the endgames will be hopeless.

28...Bd4!?

Given the choice, 28...Nxb8 29 dxe6 (or 29 Ne3!?) 29...Qxc4 30 e7 was apparently not something Black wanted to risk.

29 dxe6?!

29 Qg3 Rf6 30 Qxg4 fxg4 31 Rxf6 Nxf6 is only slightly better for Black, whereas now it is all over.

29...Bxf2 30 exd7 Bxd7 31 Ne5 Qd4 32 Rd1 Qb4 33 Nxd7 Bd4 34 Be5 Qxb2 35 Bxd4 cxd4 36 Nd5 Qe2

The three pieces are not worth the queen as they are hopelessly uncoordinated, and the passed d-pawn will cost White one of them anyway.

37 Rc1 Kf7 38 h3 d3 39 Rc7 Ke6 40 N7b6 d2 0-1

Index of Variations

Rare Variations

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5

2...e6 3 g3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Bg2 b5

7 Nf3 66; 7 b4 70

3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 (Diagram)

6 Nf3 g6 7 Bg5

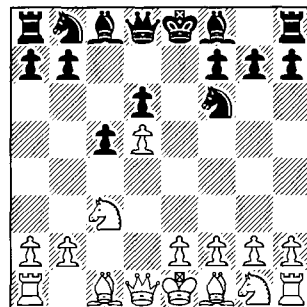
7 Qa4+ 81; 7 Bf4 82; 7 Nd2 Bg7 8 Nc4 73

7 h3 a6 8 a4 Qe7 85

7...h6 8 Bh4 Bg7 9 e3

9...g5 76

9...a6 78



The Fianchetto Variation

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6

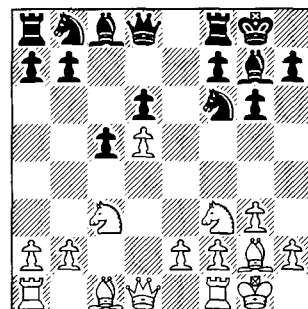
6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 (Diagram)

9...a6 10 a4 Re8 99

9...Nbd7

10 Nd2 91

10 e4 95



Systems with f2-f3

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6

6 e4 g6 7 f3 (Diagram)

7 Bd3 Bg7 8 Nge2 0-0 9 0-0 Ng4 113

7...Bg7 8 Be3

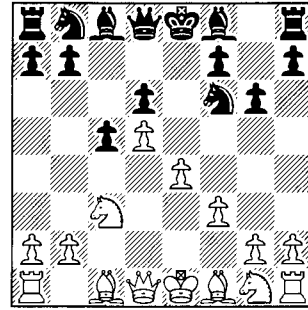
8 Nge2 0-0 9 Ng3 Nh5 111

8 Bg5 0-0 9 Qd2 h6 10 Be3 104

8...0-0 9 Nge2 Nbd7 10 Ng3 Ne5 11 Be2

11...a6 106

11...h5 109



Systems with f2-f4

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6

6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+

8 e5!? 119

8 Nf3 0-0 9 Be2

9...Nbd7 121

9...Bg4 123

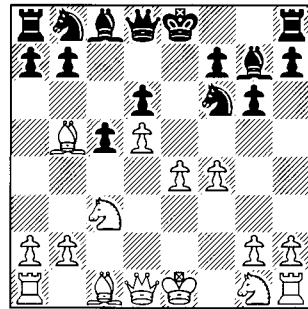
8...Nfd7

8...Nbd7 126

9 a4 132

9 Bd3 129

9 Nf3 131



The Modern Variation: e2-e4, Nf3 and h2-h3

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6

6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 (Diagram) 7...Bg7

7...a6 8 h3 b5 138

8 h3 0-0 9 Bd3 b5 10 Nxb5

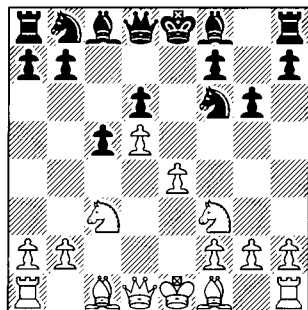
10 Bxb5 141

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10...Nxe4 143

11 Nd2 147

11 0-0 145



Classical Sidelines with Nf3 and e2-e4

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6

6 Nf3 g6 (Diagram) 7 Bf4

7 e4

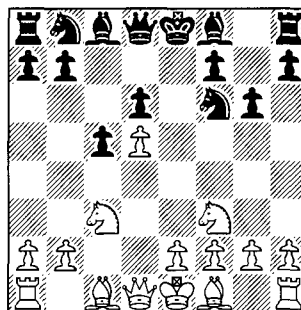
7...Bg7 8 Bg5 151

7...a6 8 a4 Bg4 9 Qb3 157

7...a6

8 e4 b5 9 Qe2 153

8 a4 Bg7 9 e4 Bg4 155



Classical Main Line: Nf3-d2 with e2-e4

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6

6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8

10 Nd2 (Diagram) 10...Na6

10...Nbd7

11 Qc2 Ne5 12 b3 168

11 a4 a6 12 Qc2 Ne5 13 Ra3 169

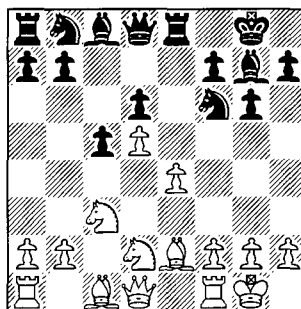
11 Kh1 Nc7 12 a4 b6

12...Rb8 13 f4 162

13 f3

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13...Rb8 165



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starting out: modern benoni

Ideal for those wanting to understand the basics of the Modern Benoni.

The Modern Benoni is one of Black's most ambitious and audacious defences to the queen's pawn opening, and it has been used with devastating effect by such legends as Mikhail Tal, Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov. From the very start Black creates an exceptional imbalance in the position, one which leads to dynamic play and gives Black real chances to seize the initiative. Both players must be fearless in their approach, as hesitation in the Modern Benoni often leads to disaster!

In this user-friendly book, International Master Endre Vegh goes back to basics, studying the fundamental principles of the Benoni and its many variations. Throughout the book there are an abundance of notes, tips, warnings and exercises to help the improving player, while key strategies, ideas and tactics for both sides are clearly illustrated.

- User-friendly design to help readers absorb ideas
- Concentrates on the key principles of the Modern Benoni
- Ideal for the improving player

Endre Vegh is an International Master from Hungary. He is an experienced writer, an openings expert and has also been involved in coaching some of Hungary's top junior players. This is his first book for Everyman Chess.



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